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ABSTRACT

This report discusses why new teachers enter the profession and what they think of it now that they are teaching. It also examines the perspectives of young college graduates in other professions and captures the observations of school superintendents and principals. Researchers conducted telephone interviews with members of each group and focus groups with beginning teachers and college graduates. Results indicated that beginning teachers were motivated, committed, and doing what they wanted to do. Low salaries kept some people out of teaching, though incentives other than salaries actually attracted people to the profession. Teachers wanted smaller classes and more administrative and parental support. Almost one in five young graduates in other fields expressed real interest in teaching, and it was not low salaries keeping them away but rather the worry that they could not make a difference. Teachers believed that good teaching comes from what happens daily in the classroom, not from the pages of a book. Six chapters discuss: (1) "Are New Teachers Demoralized and Uncommitted?" (2) "Are Talented Young People Avoiding the Profession?" (3) "Is Money the Problem?" (4) "Is Certification the Problem?" (5) "Is Teacher Preparation the Problem?" and (6) "Do Working Conditions Undermine Teacher Performance?" (Contains 10 endnotes.) (SM)

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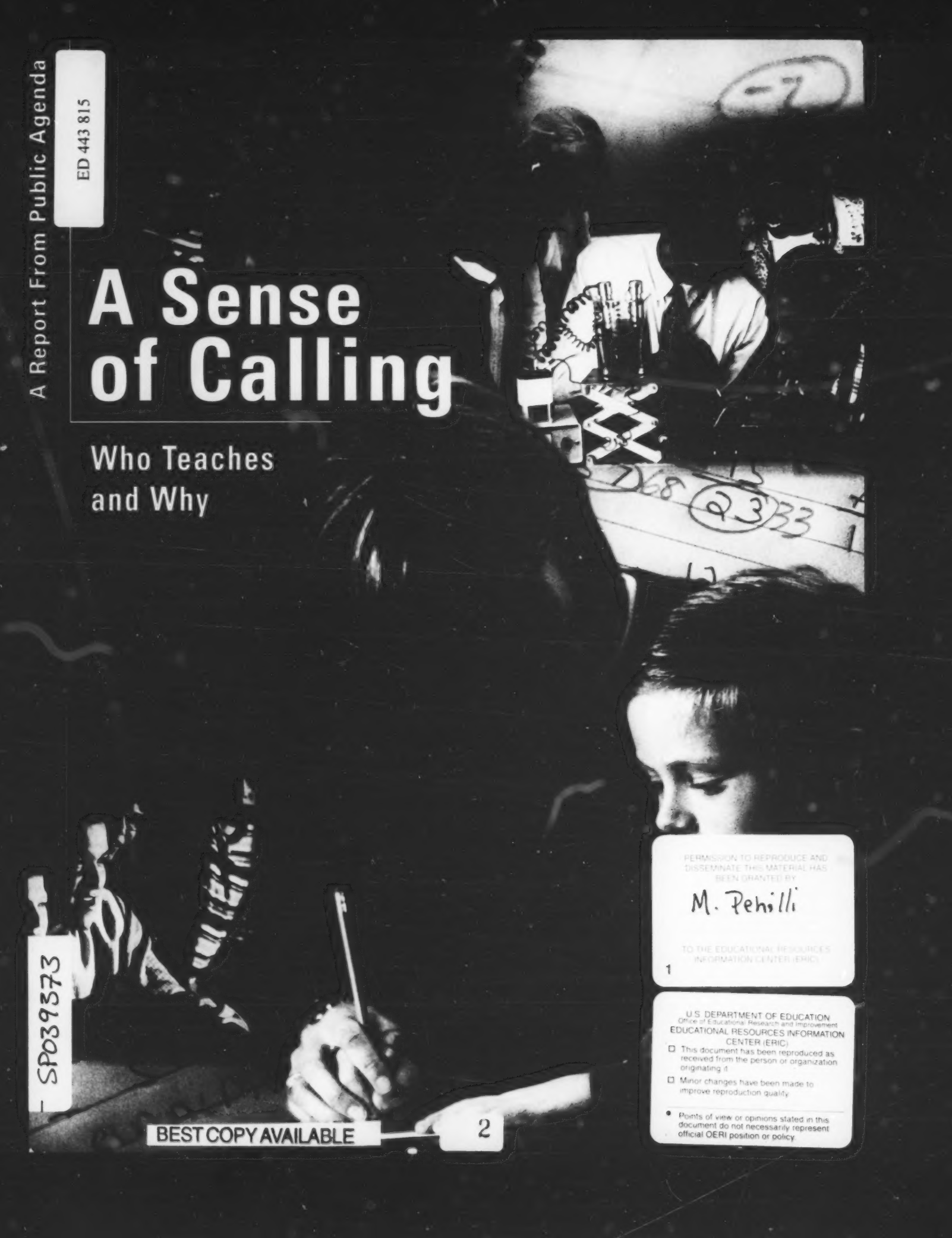
A Report From Public Agenda

A Sense of Calling

Who Teaches and Why



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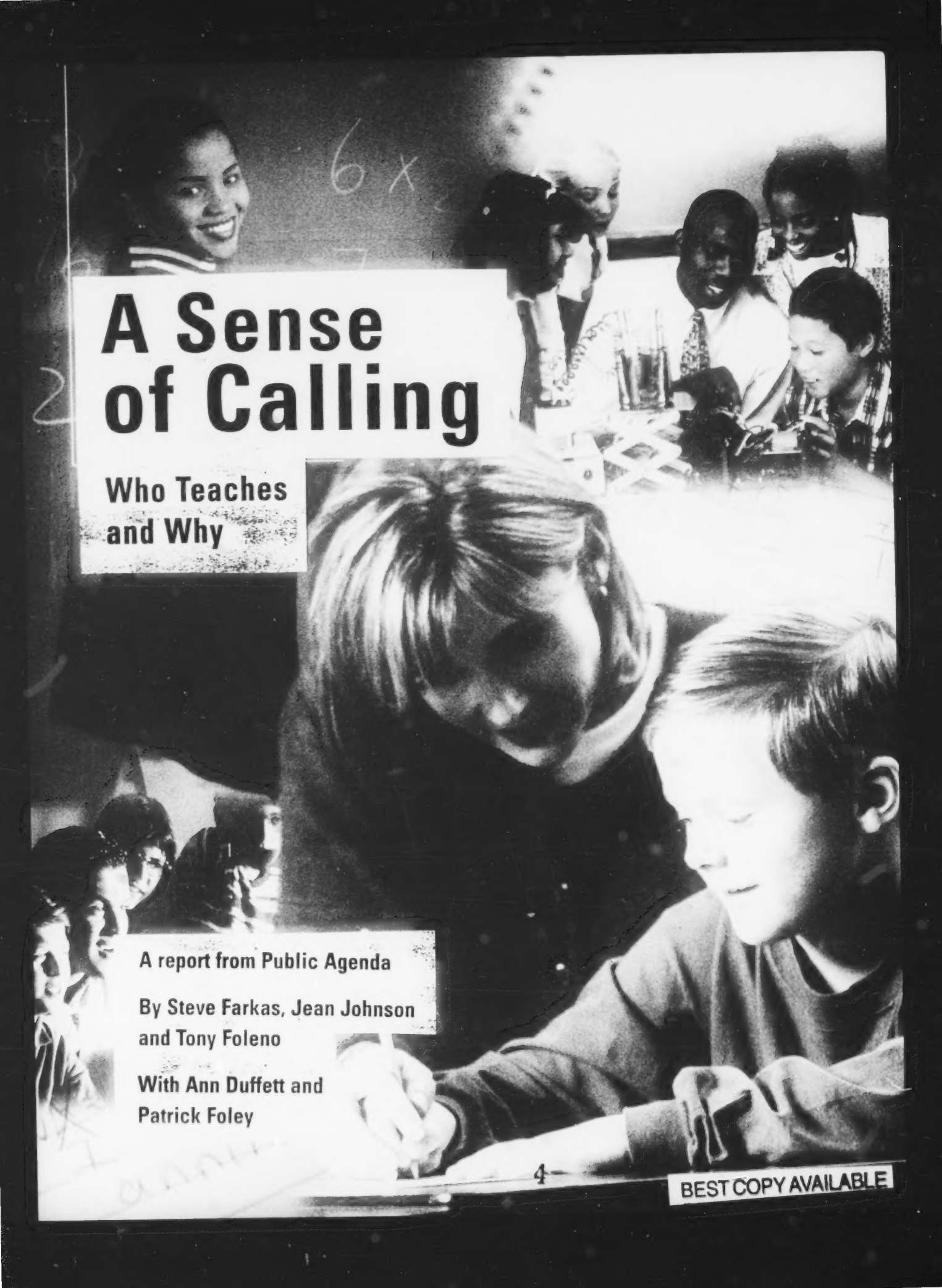

A Sense of Calling

Who Teaches and Why

A report from Public Agenda

By Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson and Tony Foleno

With Ann Duffett and Patrick Foley

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ABOUT PUBLIC AGENDA

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Public Agenda's particular expertise lies in crafting research studies that explore different points of view with empathy and probe beneath surface responses to capture the public's concerns and assumptions. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy forms the basis for extensive citizen education work. Our citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our Web site, Public Agenda Online (www.publicagenda.org) provides comprehensive information on a wide range of public opinion and public policy issues.

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Daniel Yankelovich, who joined with Cyrus Vance more than two decades ago to found Public Agenda. Dan's thinking on public opinion remains at the core of our work.

And Public Agenda's President, Deborah Wadsworth, whose dedication to the issues and remarkable insight guide our organization.

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INTRODUCTION

Just about everybody, it seems, has something to say about teachers these days. Given the intense public debate over schools, standards, student skills and related issues, it is perhaps inevitable that teachers and teaching would come under the microscope. Teacher pay and licensing, tenure and accountability, teaching methods and teacher morale have all joined a long list of divisive issues that now encircle public education.

In some ways, it would be surprising if teaching had not begun to attract the scrutiny that surrounds topics such as school funding or governance or standards. In the end, whatever reforms we pursue and whatever standards we set, we count on teachers to go into classrooms and instruct, guide, inspire, motivate, cajole and occasionally prod our kids to learn. We count on teachers to deliver the goods.

A Profession of Last Resort?

While debate over how best to prepare, reward and motivate today's teachers has brewed for some years, a spate of recent headlines has complicated and intensified the issue. More than half of the aspiring teachers taking the 1998 Massachusetts state certification exam failed it, a development that prompted questions nationwide.[1] Has teaching, some observers wondered, become a second-tier profession? Does it now appeal mainly to young people who lack the educational accomplishments needed for better-paying careers?

Another widely publicized study showed that about 1 teacher out of 5 leaves the field during his or her first few years.[2] Again the questions begin to emerge: Are young teachers so uncommitted that anyone who can leave, will? Are they so discouraged that escape seems the only route? Does this mean that the teachers who stay are mainly those with no better options? To many in education, especially those working daily in the nation's classrooms, these questions seem overblown and even blatantly unfair, but they have emerged as part of the nation's education debate.

Adding fuel to the fire these questions generate are predictions of a teacher shortage likely to hit school districts nationwide over the coming decade.[3] If talented young people are avoiding teaching as a career, if the most qualified young people routinely go elsewhere, if young teachers leave the profession in droves, *and* if we need more (and better) teachers than ever, then the nation does indeed face a serious problem.

Has teaching, some observers wondered, become a second-tier profession? Does it now appeal mainly to young people who lack the educational accomplishments needed for better-paying careers?

Getting the Attention It Deserves

Alarmed by this scenario, experts and decision makers have formed a number of high-level commissions and study groups to examine the situation, determine the degree to which these fears about the profession are warranted, and propose solutions where needed.

Researchers are also attempting to put the facts of the case in place, working to document how academically qualified young teachers really are and what actually happens to them as they pursue their careers. *Education Week*, for example, devoted its year 2000 Quality Counts report to a carefully prepared census of state practices regarding teacher certification, preparation, professional development and other important statistics.[4]

Examining a State of Mind

A Sense of Calling: Who Teaches and Why takes a different approach to illuminating the issue. In this report, Public Agenda focuses not on policy analysis or statistical trends, but on the perceptions and assumptions, concerns and aspirations, of three key groups involved. *A Sense of Calling* reports on what new teachers —

currently in their first few years in the classroom — have to say about why they entered the profession and what they think of it now that they are on the job. It also examines the perspective of young college graduates who did not choose teaching as a career. Finally, it captures the observations and concerns of those who hire and supervise the nation's teachers — school superintendents and principals in communities across the United States. Public Agenda's work on *A Sense of Calling* was sponsored by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the Open Society Institute.

The Research

Like most Public Agenda studies, *A Sense of Calling* grew out of a multifaceted research effort that began with one-on-one interviews with leading experts whose work focuses on teachers and teaching. The study also included focus groups with younger teachers in both public and private schools and with young people in other lines of work. At the heart of the research were three national telephone surveys, one of 664 public school and 250 private school teachers with five years' experience or less; a second of 802 college graduates under 30, now in jobs other than teaching; and a third of 511 school superintendents and principals. Additional details about how the study was designed and conducted are provided in the Methodology (p. 49).

For Public Agenda, *A Sense of Calling* is the latest of more than a dozen opinion studies on public education conducted over the last decade. This body of research has examined a wide variety of educational topics, including student achievement, academic standards, curriculum, safety and discipline, integration, accountability, parental involvement and bilingual education, among others. During this time, we have looked closely at the views of the general public, parents, teachers, students, employers and college professors, along with those of key subgroups such as white, African American, Hispanic and foreign-born parents.

Understanding what matters to people, what motivates them and why they do what they do can make the difference between a conversation that moves forward and one that goes nowhere.

Perceptions vs. Facts

The perceptions and attitudes captured in *A Sense of Calling* may surprise many of those steeped in policy discussions about the nation's teaching corps. What new teachers have to say about their chosen profession—and what other young graduates have to say about the profession they did not choose—seem to fly in the face of some widely held assumptions among opinion leaders, not to mention some of the rhetoric gracing the nation's op-ed pages. In many ways, the findings suggest that some much discussed approaches to strengthening the teaching profession may not be as effective as advocates hope. At the same time, the research also suggests that there are promising avenues for addressing this issue that now attract little leadership attention.

It is important to point out that what people think and feel about their jobs—the perceptions and attitudes captured in *A Sense of Calling*—are not facts. This report, for example, does not shed much light on whether the academic skills of beginning teachers are actually better or worse than those of other young college graduates, or better or worse than they used to be. But it does shed light on something that may be equally important.

The Human Factor

When it comes to shaping policies that affect human beings—policies that almost invariably depend on human acquiescence and cooperation for success—perceptions can take on a monumental importance. Understanding what matters to people, what motivates them and why they do what they do can make the difference between a conversation that moves forward and one that goes nowhere. It can make the difference between reforms that zero in on a problem and those that are off the mark. And it can make the difference between policies that actually work vs. those that go awry.

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CHAPTER ONE: ARE NEW TEACHERS DEMORALIZED AND UNCOMMITTED?

Despite headlines depicting new teachers as disillusioned, findings from this study show that the overwhelming majority of new teachers say that teaching is work they love to do. Most beginning teachers—those who have been in the classrooms for five years or less—say that they want a job where they can make a difference and that they have committed to teaching as a lifelong choice. School administrators—superintendents and principals—also give the new teaching corps high marks. And despite high-profile predictions of a pending teacher shortage, few school administrators currently report widespread hiring problems in their districts. They point to pockets of shortages that they characterize as serious but manageable.

Who's Teaching Now?

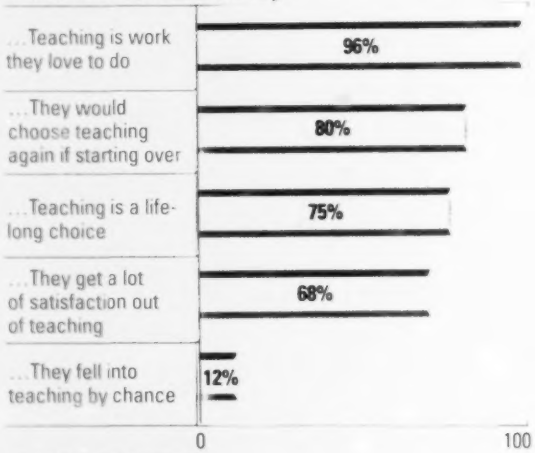
The nation's public school teaching corps—its quality and supply—has been occupying center stage in the seemingly endless debate on how to improve education. As the movement to improve academic standards and student achievement evolves and gains momentum, attention has inevitably come to focus on those who are on the front line of implementation—the teachers. Assumptions and hypotheses about teachers—how much they know, how much they care, how well-prepared they are—abound, and they lie behind some of the most talked about policy initiatives intended to ratchet up student performance.

To take a fresh look at the problem, this study examines the issue through a distinctive research design, comparing the perceptions of three groups: school principals and superintendents, new teachers (in the field for five years or less) and college graduates under the age of 30 who did not choose teaching as a career. Do the new teachers entering the profession lack motivation and spirit, or do they bring energy and commitment with them? Have young people truly turned their backs on the profession? What would it take to get young college graduates to take a second look at teaching as a career? Is money really the chief obstacle to recruiting the most talented?

The quality of the nation's teaching corps has been under fire from certain quarters for quite some time. Observers differ on whether teacher quality is really declining—and even those who believe it is offer very different explanations. Some say difficult working conditions and relatively low pay discourage talented young people from teaching. Some say teacher quality has eroded as an unintended consequence of increased opportunities for women. Some fear that teaching now appeals to too many young people with lackluster skills and little drive who are lured by the promise of secure jobs with summers off and *pro forma* pay raises. Adding any of these arguments together brings out broad fears that new teachers are routinely disgruntled and disaffected in a job that all agree requires talent, judgment, enthusiasm and skill.

Why Teachers Teach

% of New Teachers who say:



NEW TEACHERS

Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

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A Sense of Calling

But an in-depth look at the newest cohort of teachers—those who have been in the classrooms for five years or less—suggests a dramatically different picture. At least by their own report—and that of administrators—most young teachers are highly motivated professionals who bring a strong sense of commitment and morale to their work. New teachers see themselves as talented, hardworking professionals who have responded to a calling. They convey a love and dedication to their craft.

New teachers are quick to point out that theirs is a profession that requires a sense of mission. More than 8 in 10 (86%) believe only those with "a true sense of calling" should pursue the work. A teacher in the Cleveland school district had been uninspired by his experience in business and decided to pursue his true calling. "I have always just had the feeling that I want to get into education and work with youth. That is something I always wanted to do…I just had this feeling, you know what I mean? I was in business for four years and that really didn't spark my interest. When I get to teach, it does."

The profession demands high levels of effort and energy, according to the teachers, and one needs to be truly motivated to thrive. Nine in 10 (90%) say teaching requires more talent and hard work than a lot of other professions—and 65% strongly hold that view. Enthusiasm for the job as an essential was a theme that came up repeatedly in the interviews with teachers.

"You can really tell. You can watch for five minutes and see how the teacher interacts and find out if they have a passion for it. It is so evident," said a young teacher in New Jersey. Nearly all new teachers surveyed fit this description—96% say teaching is work they love to do, and almost 7 in 10 (68%) say they are getting a lot of satisfaction from it. "I don't want to do a job that I don't like and don't have fun with. I have the chance to work with the kids and teach something that I really like and hopefully make it interesting," said another young New Jersey teacher.

What's more, they overwhelmingly believe that the other new teachers they work with share their enthusiasm and commitment: 98% characterize their colleagues as highly motivated and energetic. This appraisal is consistent across the board for teachers in all types of schools—whether they work in urban or suburban districts, primary or secondary schools. A young teacher in Maryland explained his firm belief that enthusiasm for the job was a prerequisite for success: "If I'm not excited about what I'm doing, neither are they. You have to sell it first…it's a real package deal."

Is Teaching Satisfying?

How important is it to you that a job have each of the following characteristics?

% of New Teachers responding:	Absolutely Essential	Current Teaching Position Has It
Involves work you love to do	83%	96%
Allows enough time to be with family	81	79
Contributes to society and helps others	72	97
Provides the supervision and support you need	64	78
Has job security	60	84
Gives the sense that you are respected and appreciated	59	66
Has good opportunities for advancement	33	59
Pays well	30	31

There for the Right Reasons

The study asked teachers to rate the most important attributes of a job for them personally. Taken in sum, their responses indicate an idealistic personnel corps looking to do work out of love more than money. Given a list of eight attributes a job could have—from opportunities for advancement, to security, to doing work they love, to pay—teachers identify three things

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that are most important to them. True, 81% cite having enough time to be with family, but as we see when we look at the views of other young professionals, this attitude is hardly confined to teachers. But virtually the same percentage (83%) of young teachers also say doing work that they love is absolutely essential to them. And the third most important attribute they cite is telling as well—a sense they are contributing to society and helping others (72%). Other factors, such as pay and opportunities for advancement, are not nearly as important to them. Finally, when forced to choose *just one* characteristic that is most important of all, the plurality (38%) say it is doing work they love to do.

Moreover, the vast majority of beginning teachers surveyed for this study report that their jobs actually do offer the attributes they value most. When it comes to those top three attributes—work they love, having time with family and contributing to society—overwhelming percentages (96%, 79% and 97%, respectively) say that teaching provides these things.

Teacher Retention—How Big a Problem Is It?

Many experts and decision makers voice concern that new teachers are often overwhelmed when they first come into the profession and soon become frustrated and eager to leave. An analysis of a Department of Education study in *Education Week* concluded that about 20% of new teachers leave after a few years,[5] and research for this study shows a comparable number (19%) who predict they will probably change careers.

But what this report also shows—and what often seems lost in the debate over teacher retention—is the remarkable commitment, enthusiasm and vitality of the majority who choose to stay. Large numbers of new teachers express strong satisfaction with their career choice, and few seem to be second-guessing the path they chose or to be planning an exit strategy. Far from doubtful, most new teachers see their work as the commitment of a lifetime: three-quarters (75%) say they view their current profession as a "lifelong choice."

Although the statistics on new teacher turnover have generated broad comment, they may be less jarring when seen in the context of a highly mobile workforce and compared to other young workers also in the process of "finding themselves." In this study, 19% of new teachers say they'll probably change careers at some point. In contrast, half (50%) of young college grads who did not enter teaching say they expect to change careers.

"As Long As I Can Remember"

Still another indication that the teaching corps enjoys high levels of commitment from its newest contingent is that most are there by design, not accident. Only 12% say teaching is a career they fell into by chance; more than half (52%) say it is something they had been hoping to do for quite some time; and 34% say they chose teaching when they were in college. Rather than haphazardly falling into the profession, most new teachers appear to have planned their course well in advance. Some say they had been committed to becoming teachers for so long that they couldn't remember wanting to do anything else: "There was never anything else I was going to do, so I never had to think much about it," said a New Jersey teacher. "I wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember," said a teacher in Maryland. Others, like this teacher in the same Maryland focus group, carefully tested the waters: "I substituted for a couple of years to see if that's what I wanted to do."

"I wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember" — *Maryland teacher*

Having gotten into the classroom, new teachers feel confident they are in the right place, and few are second-guessing their choice. More than 9 in 10 (91%) think their skills and interests fit well with the demands of the profession. The overwhelming majority (80%) say even if they were starting all over, they would again opt to become teachers.

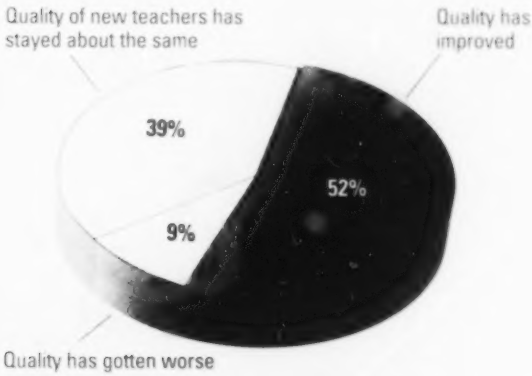
School Administrators: Our Teachers Are Better than Ever

It may not be all that surprising to hear new teachers describe themselves in positive terms, but what do their bosses—school superintendents and principals—think about the new crop of teachers? To understand "management's" perspective, Public Agenda randomly surveyed 511 public school principals and superintendents, asking them to pinpoint, through a full complement of questions, the strengths and weaknesses of new teachers, the areas where teacher supply is a problem, and the proposals to improve teacher quality they think show the most promise. In many ways, the responses of these school administrators are some of the most provocative findings of this study—sometimes confirming, sometimes dispelling the views of new teachers and the tenor of current policy discussions.

Overall, school administrators are remarkably upbeat. Almost all see the new teaching corps as highly motivated and energetic (98% say this describes most of their new teachers). One superintendent in an upstate New York school district explained why he thought this was true: "Two things motivate today's new teacher: some teacher they had inspired them, and they think they can make a difference."

Is Teacher Quality Declining?

Has the quality of new teachers coming into the profession in recent years improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?



SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

In fact, school administrators overwhelmingly reject the oft heard lament that teacher quality is on the decline. Most say that in their experience the quality of new teachers coming into the profession in recent years has either improved (52%) or stayed the same (39%). Asked if it is the supply or quality of teachers that is currently the more pressing problem to them, 50% of administrators say it is the former, a third (32%) point to quality, and another 13% volunteer that neither is a problem.

The Need for Warm Bodies

Some commentators, such as Arthur Levine, president of Teachers College, warn that the increasing need for teachers threatens to collide with simultaneous efforts to toughen hiring requirements.[7] Since they oversee the hiring of teachers and staffing of schools, superintendents and principals are uniquely positioned to provide a "real time" report on teacher supply. Perhaps to the surprise of experts predicting major shortages, most school administrators report that the problems they are facing at this time are in specific areas and that they are quite manageable.

Most school administrators are facing at least some type of teacher shortage, and two-thirds (66%) say they have had to go through extra effort to recruit the teachers they need in recent years. But few (15%) say the shortage is widespread—instead, 62% describe the shortage as being in specific types of teachers. And ultimately, most feel they are able to handle the problem—a strong majority (76%) of the administrators facing teacher shortages describe it as a "serious but manageable" challenge; only 24% seem overwhelmed by a problem they call "severe and hard to overcome."

Those intimate with the state of the teaching profession will probably not be surprised to hear where administrators say specific shortages lie: Nearly 7 in 10 (68%), for example, say there is a lack of minority teachers. "I was a rare commodity," said a young African American male teacher. "The people at the university I was at, they said, 'Where do you want to go? You can write your own ticket.'" Even more administrators (90%) say they are facing teacher shortages in specific subject areas, often reported

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in the media to be in math and the sciences or in special education.

Not surprisingly, urban educators are feeling the crunch more than those in suburban or rural districts. More than twice as many urban administrators (26% urban compared with 11% suburban) say they are facing a widespread shortage, and a large majority (78%) say they have had to go through extra effort to recruit in recent years. Urban administrators (83%) are also more likely to say they are facing a shortage of minority teachers.

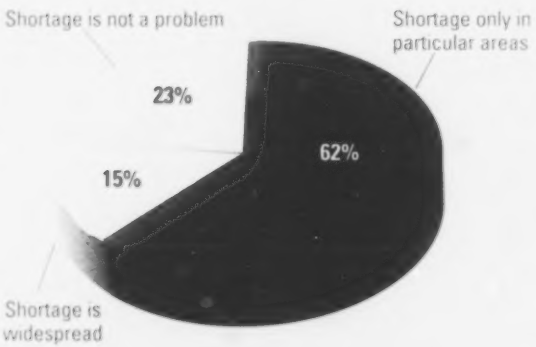
Despite these problems, the overall picture in these findings makes an important point: They tell us that administrators are not yet in a panic, and a large swath of them have yet to feel the twinges of a shortage.

The Problem That Is Not There

It is fairly obvious that many ingredients are necessary for teachers to thrive and be effective. Desire and motivation are only part of the equation. Knowledge, training, resources and workplace conditions—issues we look at later in this report—are key as well. But the strength and vibrancy of new teachers' morale and motivation are noteworthy, if only because they strongly challenge a persistent assumption of the debate on teacher quality—that teaching is somehow attracting a group of somnolent slackers, people trapped in jobs they don't really care about and just can't wait to leave. If anything, based on the findings of this report, the opposite seems to be the case.

Teacher Shortages Only in Some Areas

Is your district facing a shortage of teachers only in particular areas, is it facing a widespread shortage, or is this not a problem?



SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

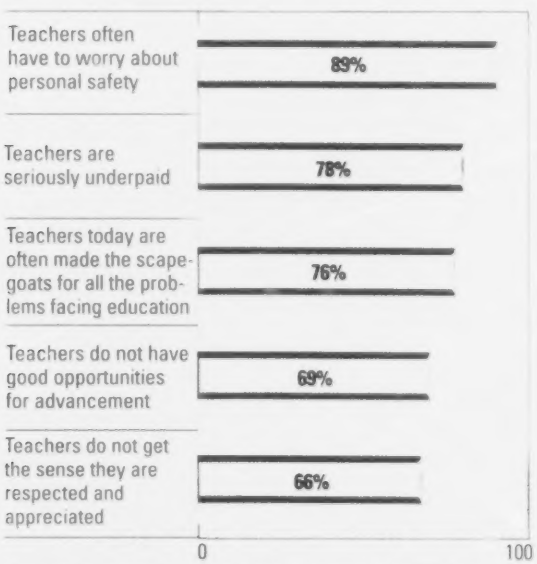
CHAPTER TWO: ARE TALENTED YOUNG PEOPLE AVOIDING THE PROFESSION?

Most college graduates under the age of 30 hold teaching in high esteem and can see a variety of benefits to a teaching career. But most are also quick to point out the downsides they see, such as low pay, limited opportunity for career advancement and low social prestige. In the end, however, few are repelled by the possibility of teaching, and there is also a small core group who would seriously consider it. These "leaners" are mostly motivated by the possibility of making a difference in the lives of at-risk students and by the hope that they would work with kids who are well-behaved and eager to learn.

In Chapter One, we described the perspective of those who did enter the teaching profession; here, we probe the attitudes of those who did not. Conventional wisdom has it that young people today look down on teaching as an undesirable profession offering an unhappy combination of low pay and low prestige—a refuge of last resort for the uninspired. People may applaud the profession from afar, the thinking goes, but few would be happy to see their own children join its ranks, much less join it themselves. To explore these questions, Public Agenda surveyed a group of people who passed on the idea of teaching: 802 college graduates under the age of 30. We asked them about their current jobs, their image of the teaching profession and what might make teaching a more attractive profession to them.

Drawbacks of Teaching

% of Young College Graduates who say:


Teachers often have to worry about personal safety
89%
Teachers are seriously underpaid
78%
Teachers today are often made the scapegoats for all the problems facing education
76%
Teachers do not have good opportunities for advancement
69%
Teachers do not get the sense they are respected and appreciated
66%
0
100

YOUNG GRADUATES IN OTHER CAREERS

Respect, Not Derision

"Those who can, do; those who can't, teach" is an oft heard put-down aimed at teachers. One might expect that many of America's young and educated look at the profession with this sort of disdain. But the findings from this study belie the thinking that young people look down on teaching. The opposite seems true: young college graduates see teaching in promising, elevated terms—as a challenging, secure and emotionally rewarding job where one has the chance to make a difference. In fact, about 4 in 10 (39%) say they seriously considered going into the teaching profession while they were attending college.

More of a Contribution than My Job

Strong majorities of young college grads recognize that teaching holds strong nonmaterial rewards—97% say that teachers contribute to society and help others and 80% say it provides a more important benefit to society than the job they themselves currently hold. By a nearly 3 to 1 margin (64% to 22%), they say being a teacher requires more dedication and commitment than their current job. It is a profession, say 82% of college graduates, that requires a true sense of calling. They're in concurrence with new teachers—86% of whom also agree with this statement. The

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impression of teachers as an idealistic, dedicated corps continues, with 90% saying that teachers are doing work they love to do. As a computer programmer in Maryland remarked, "Everything [teachers] do is angled towards other people, not towards themselves. I'm sure they get fulfilled by what they do." And although 58% can still remember the name of a specific teacher who had a strong negative influence on them, a significantly larger proportion—87%—can remember a teacher who had a strong positive influence on them.

But sentiment and self-sacrifice are not all they see. More concrete benefits—having enough time to be with family (89% say teachers have this) and job security (83% say teachers have this)—are two factors adding luster to the profession.

Low Pay and Limited Career Growth

Part of the reality, however, is that young college grads are also quick to point out the downsides they see to teaching. Not surprisingly, low pay often tops their list of negatives. Almost 8 in 10 (78%) agree with the statement "Teachers are seriously underpaid." In the focus groups with young professionals, most said that they are not driven to make a lot of money, but they also said that they wanted to be financially "comfortable"—and for many, a teacher's salary does not fit this definition.

About 7 in 10 (69%) think that public school teachers do not have good opportunities for advancement—and at the same time, about 7 in 10 (68%) believe that their current jobs do provide this. Most of these twentysomethings are looking forward to a future where their salaries will progress on pace with their experience. In this survey, less than half (47%) make more than $35,000 a year, but the majority (54%) also say that in the next 10 years they have a lot of potential to earn a significantly higher salary in their current field. In focus groups, it became clear that they see teachers reaching a plateau too early in their careers. Those hiring teachers—superintendents and principals—recognize this downside: 66% agree that "the lack of upward mobility for teachers is a key obstacle to making the profession attractive."

"The Salary Just Tops Out"

Those who had contemplated teaching recalled that these considerations had played a major role in their decision to take a pass on the profession. "I thought about it [going into teaching] in my freshman year of college," recalled a New Jersey woman who is now a marketing representative for a mutual fund company. "I actually took some education classes.... I think it would be very rewarding. But as sad as it is to say, the salary just tops out. I just knew that long term I'd just want to keep bettering myself and making more money."

"Everything [teachers] do is angled towards other people, not towards themselves. I'm sure they get fulfilled by what they do."

— Maryland computer programmer

Ironically, it may be that many young people have too pessimistic an estimation of how much money teachers make. In this survey, about half (52%) of young people say the average yearly salary of public school teachers in their state is under $30,000, something that was true in only four states in 1998. The nation's average yearly salary for public school teachers actually stood at about $39,000.

"It's Too Hard to Be a Teacher"

But salary is not the only downside young people see when they envision teaching. They also believe that today's teachers must contend with a loss of respect—even physical threats—when they are in the schools. Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) agree that "in today's schools teachers often have to worry about their personal safety." Some of the young professionals in the focus groups described students more prone to be wild and disrespectful and parents who couldn't—or wouldn't—control their kids. "I think it's too hard to be a teacher," reflected a New Jersey man who was a sales representative for a chemical company. "Parents—it seems like they don't care anymore. The kids are wild and they think the parents will protect them." In Maryland, a young professional was explicit about her fears: "The safety concerns, the shootings—it's out of control."

Little Appreciation from Society

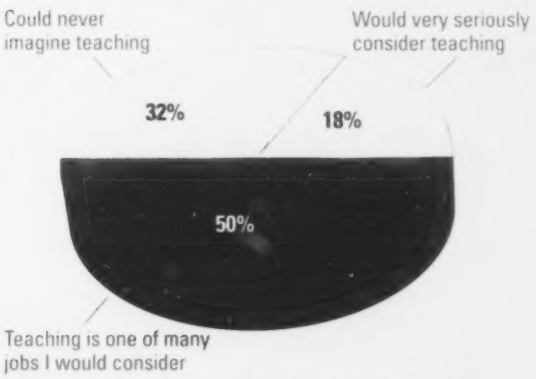
Although these young people themselves express admiration for teachers, they don't feel that society really gives teachers their due. The question of prestige comes into stronger play as young college graduates consider the thanks—or lack thereof—teachers get for their effort. Only 29% say public school teachers "get the sense that they are respected and appreciated." In fact, by a 60% to 34% margin they think their current jobs get more prestige and respect than teaching does. Another 76% also believe today's teachers are "often made the scapegoats for all the problems facing education."

Teaching: Some Would, Some Wouldn't

Overall the research suggests that young college grads hold a lot of respect for teaching as a profession, but they see downsides such as low pay, lack of appreciation and a job that can be difficult and frustrating. When asked if they would consider becoming a public school teacher if the opportunity were to present itself, 18% say they would very seriously consider it. Half (50%) fall in a middle category, saying teaching would be one of many different jobs they would consider. A surprisingly low number—32%—would never consider becoming a public school teacher.

Some Would Consider Teaching

If the opportunity were to present itself, would you consider becoming a public school teacher?



YOUNG GRADUATES IN OTHER CAREERS

A subset of the survey sample was composed of college graduates whose careers typically enjoy higher status and pay, such as lawyers, engineers, financial analysts and doctors. Even for these super-achievers, almost half (49%) say teaching is among the jobs they would consider under the right circumstances, and 14% would give it very serious consideration.

Obviously, not everyone wants to be a teacher, but the overall level of interest is still notable. After all, these respondents, although similar in age and education, are very different individuals, with different interests, talents and experiences. Given the variety of human enterprises—and society's need to have the talented work in fields such as science, business, law and a host of others—it would actually be startling if interest in teaching were any higher.

Falling into Their Jobs

Whether or not they express serious interest in teaching, it's important to note that many young college grads are not very tied to their current jobs. In striking contrast with new teachers—most of whom consider their profession to be a lifelong calling—many of these college grads have a less rigorous approach to choosing their jobs. They do not seem to be as dedicated, loyal and in love with their work as teachers.

Half of the young people (50%) believe they will change their careers at some point—in sharp contrast, 75% of new teachers think their current profession is a lifelong choice. Four in 10 (40%) young people say they fell into their current profession by chance—again, in sharp contrast, only 12% of teachers say this is how they ended up in teaching. In the focus groups, the young professionals often talked about drifting into their current positions. In New Jersey, a young insurance broker had less than inspiring reasons for choosing his line of work: "I was just sick of interviewing. And I thought, 'I'll take this job for now, make some money, pay back some loans'—I just took it."

Only 28% say they "love" their current job. And by the time they were surveyed for this study, 34% of employed young college graduates had held three or more full-time jobs since college, and another 27% had held two jobs.

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The "Leaners"—A Pool Motivated by Altruism

Given that many young people are looking for the right career fit, could they be drawn into the classroom? This question will probably become more pressing given widespread concerns about an impending teacher shortage. The survey posed hypothetical situations, asking, in effect, what it would take to move them into the nation's classrooms. The study devoted particular attention to the 18% of the sample that say they would "very seriously consider" becoming a teacher—a group we call the "leaners."

Many (47%) of these "leaners" say that if teaching paid more, they would be a lot more likely to consider the profession. But remarkably, nonmaterial factors—ones connected to making a difference—do even more to pique their interest. The clear draw to the profession would be the promise of what might be called "effective altruism." Seven in 10 (70%) would be a lot more likely to consider becoming a public school teacher if they "would be making a difference in the lives of at-risk kids headed for failure in school." The second most powerful draw again has to do with having an impact on kids: 54% say that they would be a lot more likely to consider teaching if they knew they would be "teaching kids who were well-behaved and eager to learn."

The more one young man, a computer programmer in Maryland, thought about it, the more his desire to make a difference emerged: "Especially with the younger children—preschool up to second or third grade—it's important for kids to have really good teachers. It's such a critical time for them, as far as sculpting them, as far as what they're gonna be when they get older and have to decide things for themselves.... It's something I could really enjoy."

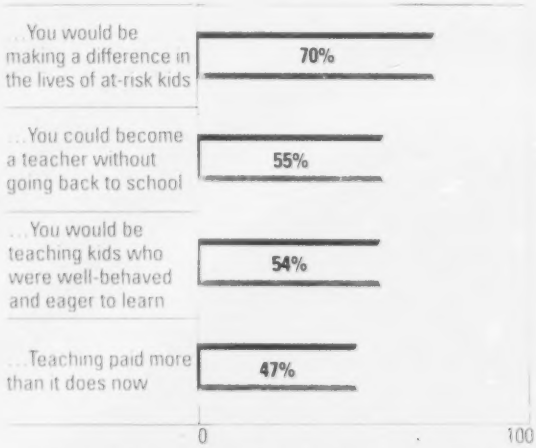
No Quick Fix

These results simultaneously offer a reassurance and a challenge to policy makers. While young college graduates are not crashing the gates to become teachers, many are intrigued by the profession and could be convinced to join its ranks. On the other hand, to deliver what many of them want—kids who are dedicated, well-behaved and interested in learning—is no simple matter. And changing some of their negative impressions of the schools and the profession calls for much more than simple image management.

In all likelihood, no single initiative would be enough to create a new surge of young educated people into the profession. In a competitive economy, money will still count. But these findings strongly suggest that to focus solely on money is to miss some potent—and typically untapped—advantages that the teaching profession enjoys. Every generation that enters the workforce during times of economic prosperity is apt to be labeled materialistic and self-indulgent if only because it manages to avoid the trials faced by older generations. Yet these findings suggest that it would be a mistake to paint the entire generation with one brush—to assume a materialistic motivation among all and to respond with a simple materialistic solution. There are strong indications that many of these young people are looking for something more.

Making a Difference

Would you be a lot more likely to consider becoming a public school teacher if...


...You would be making a difference in the lives of at-risk kids
70%
...You could become a teacher without going back to school
55%
...You would be teaching kids who were well-behaved and eager to learn
54%
...Teaching paid more than it does now
47%
0
100

YOUNG GRADUATES IN OTHER CAREERS

Base: Young graduates who would very seriously consider becoming a public school teacher (n=140)

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CHAPTER THREE: IS MONEY THE PROBLEM?

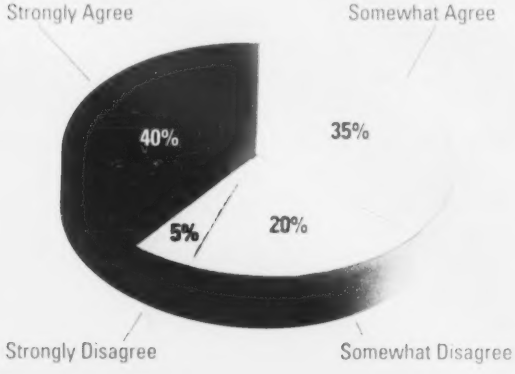
Large majorities of both administrators and new teachers say teachers are underpaid. But new teachers do not believe money is the magic bullet that is guaranteed to improve teacher quality—they rate several other measures, such as reducing class size, as more effective. Moreover, by very high margins, most would sacrifice higher pay if it meant they could work in schools with well-behaved students, motivated colleagues and supportive administrators. New teachers have mixed feelings about pay raises for specific types of work: They are in favor of paying more to those who work in difficult schools, but they don't support paying more to teachers in certain subjects, such as math or science. There is some ambivalence among new teachers about tying teachers' pay to their students' performance.

A Most Visible and Discussed Solution

Teacher pay is consistently at the forefront of discussions on how to improve the quality and supply of teachers and how to make sure that more of them stay on board. For some, it is the policy option of first choice. It has the virtue of being concrete and understandable. While expensive and politically difficult, it also has the virtue of being manageable—state legislatures and districts could decide when to raise salaries and by how much. What's more, it appeals to a basic element of human nature: almost all people need to feel suitably rewarded financially for the work they do.

New Teachers Feel Underpaid

How much do you agree with the statement "I am seriously underpaid"?



NEW TEACHERS

Waiting Tables in the Summer

It should hardly be news that teachers care about how much they are paid. In our survey of new teachers, 3 in 4 (75%) say they are seriously underpaid. Low salary was number two on a list of things the new teachers in our survey say is the worst part about being a teacher. "I thought once I was grown up I could pay my own way," protested a New York City teacher, "but I'm interviewing for waitressing jobs in the summer. I'm approaching 30 and I'm going to work alongside people who never finished high school. That does start to affect your self-esteem. If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't do it. I love my job, I love the changes that I've made in children, but that's it. That's the only gratification a teacher gets." With 90% of new teachers saying their job requires more talent and hard work than other jobs, it's predictable that some bitterness and resentment could result.

Making the World Go Round?

More than half (52%) of new teachers say increasing pay would be a "very effective" way to improve teacher quality. "I am not saying pay a million dollars," said a Cleveland teacher. "But increase pay. They have to make it look like a very lucrative job." And money is something that teachers—like other people—take into consideration when choosing where they teach. Another public school teacher who had taught in private school had a simple explanation for why she

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made the switch: "Money, I loved my school, loved it. But financially I could not live off the salary."

Most school administrators agree that teacher pay is an important issue. About 4 in 10 (41%) say that increasing teacher salary would be a "very effective" way to improve teacher quality, and another 53% say that it would be "somewhat effective."

In addition to improving teacher quality, raising salaries could also increase the size of the teaching pool. As we have seen in Chapter Two, higher pay could very well attract many more young college grads into the profession. Nearly half (47%) of those who would seriously considering teaching say that they would be a lot more likely to go into the profession if it paid more. And almost 8 in 10 (78%) of the entire sample of young college grads believe that teachers are seriously underpaid.

"I Wasn't Thinking about Money"

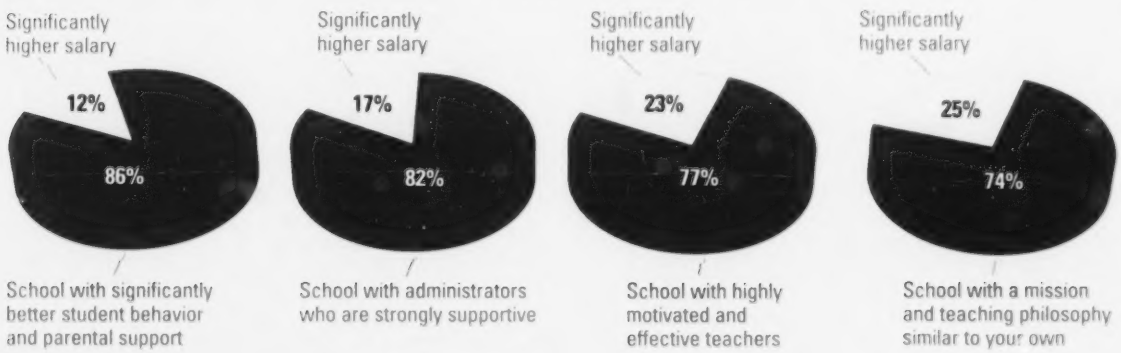
But there are strong indications that money may not be the singular motivator that some suppose. For one thing, teachers consistently insist, in the survey and throughout the focus groups, that they are in the profession out of dedication to the cause, not just for money. "Money is not everything," a teacher in Maryland simply said. "When I went to school, teaching was something I wanted to do. I wasn't thinking about the money," said one teacher in Cleveland. "When you are a teacher you are doing this because you love to do it, not because you are looking for money." Only 2% of new teachers say that, to them, the *most* important aspect of a job is that it should pay well.

Some of the teachers interviewed thought it was naive to believe that better-motivated and -qualified personnel would emerge as a result of pay increases. "Maybe they're right, maybe more money will bring more people in. But if they're coming because of money, what are you getting?" wondered a teacher in California. After all, some would argue that other professionals, such as journalists, also do not expect to make a lot of money yet seek that line of work and are respected for doing so.

A New Jersey teacher was already seeing improvements in the profession that had little connection to money: "Right now the standards are getting higher and harder for teachers, and I think teachers are getting better, but pay has not really increased that much. I don't think you necessarily get a higher-quality teacher just because you pay more. Teachers go into the profession because it's something they want to do."

But Other Factors May Be More Important

Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer?



Note: "Don't Know" responses ≤2%

NEW TEACHERS

Money Does Not Top the List

In this study, administrators and new teachers were asked in some detail to select the measures that would most improve teacher quality. The list of 11 proposals covers a lot of ground in the teacher quality debate, including ideas such as reducing class size, requiring new teachers to spend more time in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers, increasing teacher salaries and eliminating teacher tenure. (See Table 7)

The data tell us that new teachers believe they deserve more money. However, many also believe that other measures would be even more effective in terms of improving teacher quality. The top response, by a significant margin, is reducing class size—86% call this measure very effective. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) say that requiring teachers at the secondary school level to major in the subject they are teaching would be very effective. And 57% strongly endorse increasing the professional development opportunities for teachers.

In this context, although increasing teacher salaries rates fairly well, it is hardly at the top of the list. About half (52%) of new teachers say that this would be a very effective proposal. These findings point to a subtle wrinkle in the money debate: Many teachers say that they deserve more compensation, but many of them also say that if we really want to improve teacher quality, some other measures may be even more effective.

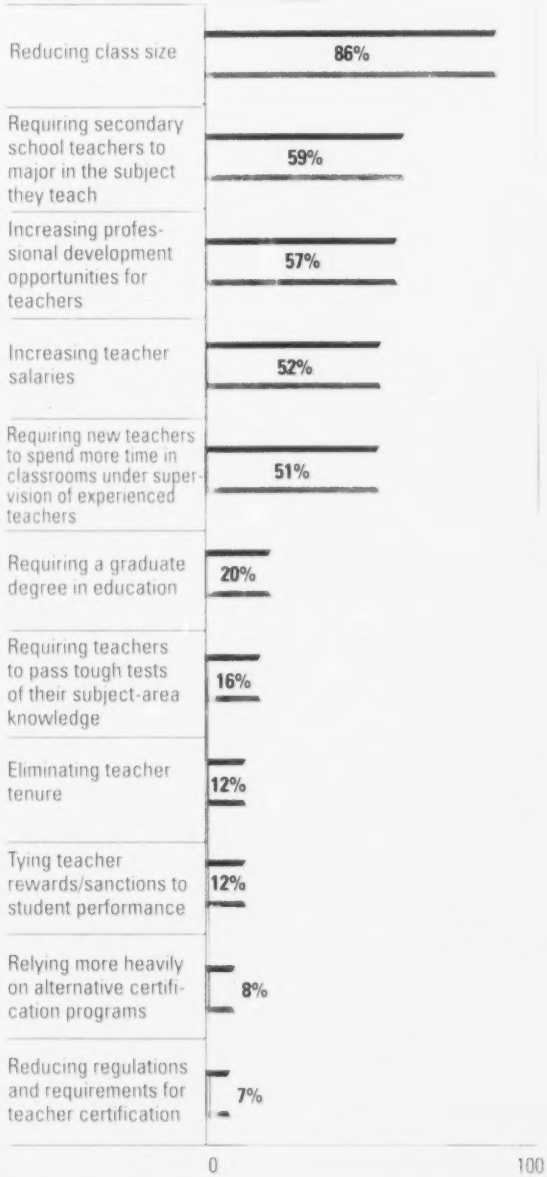
Administrators have a somewhat different list of favored proposals, but increasing teacher salaries doesn't make it to the top of their list either. Mentoring and professional development programs top their list. (See Table 7)

Money Can't Buy Me Love

To further place the money issue in context, we asked teachers to compare higher salaries with other factors they might care about and asked which they would choose if they had to. Teachers were given four different scenarios, each pitting a bigger paycheck against other benefits. In these hypothetical cases, money consistently takes a backseat in the minds of teachers.

Smaller Class Size Most Likely to Improve Teaching

% of New Teachers who say item is a "very effective" way to improve teacher quality



NEW TEACHERS

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By a nearly 9 to 1 margin (86% to 12%), teachers say they would choose a school that had better-behaved kids and more supportive parents rather than one that paid significantly more. By an 82% to 17% margin, teachers would also prefer a school where administrators give them strong backing over one with a significantly higher salary. "They can pay you a ton of money, but if you don't have that support, you're not going to be happy," explained a California teacher. "Your administrator is your boss—you want him to stand behind you when you're doing something right with students and discipline or when parent issues with grading come up." Given the choice between more money and a school with highly motivated teachers, money once again loses out, this time by a 77% to 23% margin. New teachers would also opt for the school whose teaching philosophy they shared—rather than more money—by a 74% to 25% margin.

Are these simply politically correct responses by people reluctant to admit that in the real world their bottom-line interest would prevail? Perhaps, yet school administrators—who presumably have ample reason to be honest about what motivates teachers—also believe that teachers are moved by many things other than money. Overwhelming majorities of superintendents and principals (73%) agree that the typical teacher would walk away from a bigger paycheck in favor of a school with supportive parents; in favor of a school with supportive administrators (73%); in favor of a school with motivated teachers (67%); in favor of a school whose teaching philosophy they share (62%).

Financial Incentive Schemes

Raising the average salary of all teachers is not the only question. A separate but related policy debate focuses on the idea of targeting pay raises in specific problem areas. Some would award incentives to teachers willing to work in tougher schools or in urban areas or in particular subjects. Others would tie teacher pay to measures of performance or student achievement. For their part, teachers have mixed feelings about using pay increases as incentives, reacting positively to some proposals but doubting the merits of others.

Combat Pay

New teachers have little problem, for example, with paying higher salaries to colleagues who agree to work in difficult schools with disadvantaged children: 84% believe this is a good idea. "I worked for a year in London, in an inner-city school. There it was called combat pay. New York has it in some areas, too," said a New York City teacher. "God bless them [the teachers working in tougher schools]—I personally could not do what they're doing. I know of teachers who have been assaulted in those schools. They certainly deserve more money, but they also deserve security."

Can Dollars Move New Teachers into the Cities?

While most new teachers like the idea of rewarding teachers who take on the most difficult school assignments, many would be reluctant themselves to take an offer of more money to teach in a large urban district. Asked how they would respond if public school districts in big cities were offering teachers significantly higher salaries, 29% of teachers in rural and suburban areas say they would seriously consider applying to them; out of those, only 8% say they would be "very likely" to consider it. These numbers are hardly overwhelming, and they are only declarations of interest—something easy enough to do on the phone and in response to a survey. Financial incentives might not create an immediate migration into the cities.

> ***"God bless them [the teachers working in tougher schools]—I personally could not do what they're doing… They certainly deserve more money, but they also deserve security."***
>
> *—New York City teacher*

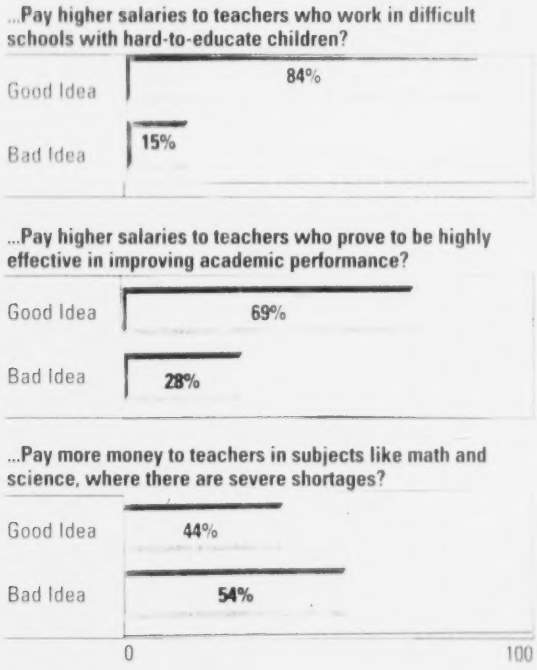
A focus group with private school teachers in suburban Westchester, New York, yielded two interesting insights: one, the teachers would be happy to be working in Westchester's public schools, principally because of money; and two, almost all would never have considered working in New York City's nearby system, even for higher pay, because they had an image of a chaotic school environment short on supportive parents, administrators or kids. Apparently, money may move some teachers to seriously consider moving, but only if other critical workplace conditions are in place.

Those Shortage Areas

Many districts across the nation are facing a shortage of teachers who specialize in subject areas such as math and science. But a majority (54%) of new teachers believe that paying more to teachers in these subjects is a bad idea. Some comments indicate this policy could foster resentment and division among the teaching corps. "I don't really agree with it," said a New Jersey teacher. "To have somebody brand new come in and make that top rate when you've been there for a few years already, it just doesn't seem fair." Ironically, this is exactly where school administrators say they are currently facing the biggest shortfall. Fully 65% of school principals and superintendents who are in districts with shortages say the most critical problem they are facing is in finding teachers of specific subject areas.

Higher Salaries for Some?

Do you think it is a good or bad idea to:



The Carrot without the Stick

Teachers seem clearly to support the notion of merit pay when it rewards top talent: 2 in 3 (69%) want higher salaries for teachers who prove to be highly effective in improving student academic performance. Speak to most teachers and they will tell you that some of their colleagues indeed stand out and deserve acknowledgment.

But, in what would seem to be a contradiction, 54% of teachers also believe it would be ineffective to tie teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance. Their opposition seems to reflect teachers' conviction that student achievement is, in large part, dependent upon parents and home life—things over which they have little control. "The school that I work in has a lot of single-family homes, a high rate of free lunch. The kids don't have that support at home, they don't have someone who reads with them. How can you pay teachers according to their performance when they can't control what parents do at home? I could be the best teacher in the world, but those negative factors—there's only so much a teacher could do."

Opposition to merit pay is also driven by teachers' doubts that fair and useful methods will be used to measure teacher effectiveness. "It's really hard to do—how are you going to measure their performance? Their scores on their standardized tests?" asked a New Jersey teacher. "I'm against merit pay for several reasons," agreed a New York teacher. "Who would judge it? Politics would certainly figure in. What would you do, let the students vote on teachers, make it a popularity contest? And if you used scores on standardized exams, it would encourage teachers to teach to the exams, and they would lose creativity. You could have an overzealous teacher spending all of their class time teaching to a test and kids wouldn't learn."

Not a Simple Matter

These results indicate that money is a far more complicated issue than is generally acknowledged in policy debates over teacher pay. It can hardly be assumed that money is unimportant. The educators in

this survey agree that teachers are seriously underpaid. A substantial chunk of young professionals could be encouraged by increased pay to seriously consider teaching. And substantial numbers of administrators and new teachers say that increasing salaries would be very effective in improving teacher quality.

At the same time, educators point to several other proposals that could prove to be even more effective in improving teacher quality. And as for targeted incentive plans, the impact of money may be surprising and even counterproductive. Teachers may, for example, actively resent salary initiatives that reward science and math teachers or that mete out rewards and penalties according to student performance.

Based on this study, it also seems unwise to presume that money is the only—or even the most important—measure that can be taken to improve the status of the profession and the quality and satisfaction of its personnel. Most new teachers would choose working with supportive administrators and motivated students over earning a higher salary. Very few teachers in the suburbs would jump at the chance to move to an urban school, even if it meant more money. These are just a few of the findings, but the constancy of this message throughout is striking. Whether it is young college graduates or new teachers, policies that have little to do with money but that focus on acquiring support from parents or administrators may prove equally and perhaps even more promising.

Teachers may, for example, actively resent salary initiatives that reward science and math teachers or that mete out rewards and penalties according to student performance.

CHAPTER FOUR: IS CERTIFICATION THE PROBLEM?

Most educators—administrators and new teachers—believe that current certification requirements guarantee only a minimum of skills. Administrators are somewhat in favor of opening up the teaching profession to qualified, motivated people who have not had formal teacher training—but most new teachers oppose this idea. Although both groups agree that it's essential for teachers to have in-depth subject knowledge, most don't believe this is a problem area for new teachers. For their part, many young college grads already interested in teaching would be a lot more likely to consider it if they did not have to go back to school first.

A Thorny Issue

Common sense dictates that not just anyone should be able to walk in and become a classroom teacher. But how should the promise of prospective teachers be gauged? States have an array of requirements teaching candidates must fulfill before they are licensed to work in the public schools.

The debate over teacher licensing can be roughly divided into two sides. Experts on one side argue that the requirements act as an artificial hurdle that pointlessly keeps talented people from considering the profession, all the while doing little to guarantee that those who jump through the hoops are top quality. Meanwhile, experts on the other side believe this hurdle needs to be strengthened, asserting that even the brightest prospects need extensive preparation before they are ready to begin teaching. They argue that teaching—like medicine or law—is a profession that demands strict entry standards.

Predictions of an impending teacher shortage muddy the waters of the debate even further. If a widespread shortage of teachers materializes, some policy makers worry that increasing certification standards will add to the problem.

The Inside Story

This study takes a look at what administrators and new teachers have to say about the multifaceted issue of certification. We look at how these groups regard several controversial issues: whether all teachers need formal study in education; whether all teachers should be required to pass licensing tests; and whether all teachers should meet higher standards in terms of subject knowledge.

The Bare Minimum

Current certification requirements across the states seem to inspire little faith and confidence among educators. In our survey of new teachers, almost all (92%) were fully certified at the time of the interviews, but they hardly voice admiration for the process or its results. Only about a quarter (26%) think that in their state being fully certified means that "a teacher has what it takes to be a good teacher." A majority (55%) instead believes that being fully certified "only guarantees a minimum of skills," while an additional 17% go so far as to say it "guarantees very little." School administrators are even more doubtful: 9 in 10 say certification guarantees either only the minimum of skills (67%) or very little (23%).

> *"[The teacher exam] tested my memory of how well I could recite stuff about Piaget, about Dewey. Some of this stuff I have forgotten already, and none of it is stuff you need to be a good teacher."*
>
> —*New York teacher*

Making a Distinction: Training vs. Tests

In focus groups, it was clear that new teachers believe some teacher preparation coursework is essential before they step in front of a class. (This is an issue we return to in Chapter Five.) Almost all (97%) had

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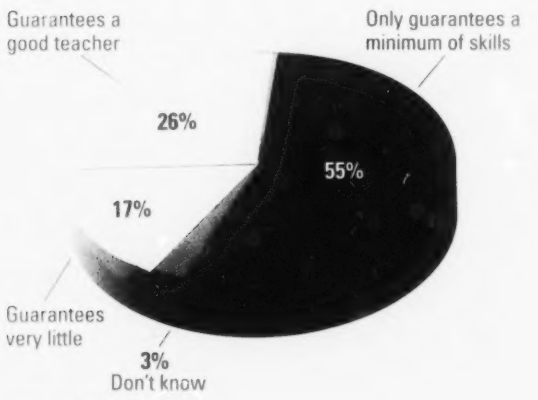
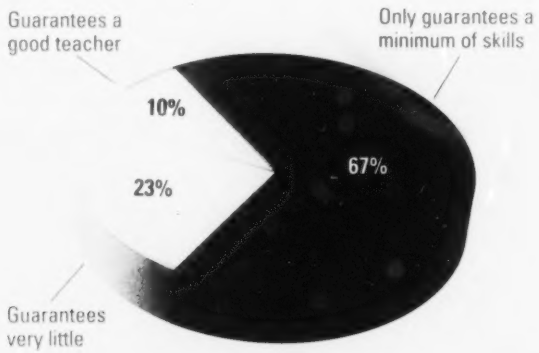
Certification Only Guarantees Minimum Skills

In your state, does being fully certified guarantee that the typical teacher has what it takes to be a good teacher, does it guarantee a minimum of skills, or does it guarantee very little?



NEW TEACHERS



SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

attended a school of education or formal teacher training program, and they were quick to defend the value of their pre-service preparation. Most scoff at those who underestimate the challenges of teaching. As one New York City teacher said about her training in education school, "I think there should be more requirements, not less.... Especially at the earlier ages, kids are changing physically and emotionally. If you're not prepared, you could cause some damage. I had some professors who are brilliant, but that doesn't mean that they could teach."

However, most derided the standardized tests they had to take as part of the certification process—a view that stands in contrast to those policy makers who are currently pushing for more testing. "I did not feel the test measured my ability to teach," said a New York teacher. "It tested my memory of how well I could recite stuff about Piaget, about Dewey. Some of this stuff I have forgotten already, and none of it is stuff you need to be a good teacher."

Many of the teachers interviewed in the focus groups also had less than flattering things to say about the National Teachers Exam (NTE). "I had to take four parts of the NTE," recalled a young Maryland teacher. "You take a knowledge part, which is anything, you take a listening test, which is a joke. You take a methods test, which is a joke. Then they ask you questions like 'A kid comes to you and he's thinking about killing himself. What do you do—do you talk to a counselor?' I spent four years in college so I could take this test?"

Subject Knowledge: Necessary but Not Sufficient

Critics of the teacher certification process charge that it favors pedagogical theory over subject knowledge. In their eyes, bright people with appropriate subject knowledge should not be barred from teaching jobs just because they haven't gone through all of the licensing requirements. Others respond that teaching requires much more than subject knowledge, which they see as only one of many important skills that need to be gauged before a person is accepted into the teaching profession.

Based on this study, most educators agree that subject knowledge is a critical element in teaching. Strong majorities of administrators (79%) and new teachers (74%) say that all teachers should be required to have in-depth understanding of the subjects they teach. And

majorities of administrators (63%) and new teachers (59%) say that requiring secondary school teachers to major in the subject they are teaching would be very effective in improving teacher quality; on the list of teacher quality initiatives they were presented, both groups ranked this proposal in the top three. (See Table 7.) It's clear that educators are not taking the importance of subject knowledge for granted.

Although new teachers are convinced that subject knowledge is important, there's no consensus about the best method of measuring it. Just 16% say that passing a rigorous exam in a subject is the best way, and 35% say that requiring a major in the subject is best. But the rest (47%) opt for the "something else" response and volunteered a variety of answers, including classroom observation, professional development seminars or simply giving discretion to the principal to make the judgment. Administrators respond to this question much in the same way as new teachers—a few (22%) favor tests, more (36%) favor requiring a college major, and 42% suggest other approaches.

It's Under Control

In contrast to much of the tenor of the policy debate, neither new teachers nor administrators believe that subject knowledge is a major weakness among teachers. New teachers give themselves high marks: 83% say that when they first entered the profession, they had sufficient knowledge of the subject matter they were teaching. Administrators agree: 74% say that most teachers entering the field have their subject knowledge well in hand.

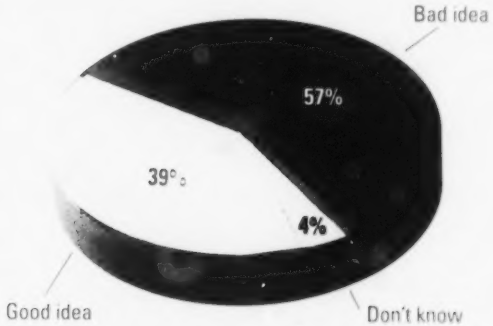
This study does confirm some leaders' concerns that teachers in urban school systems, where shortages are more acute, may not be as well-versed in the subjects they are teaching. More than half (54%) of new teachers in urban districts say that it's common for teachers in their schools to be teaching subjects out of their field. In contrast, far fewer (27%) new teachers in suburban districts say it's common.

Skills vs. Self-Esteem

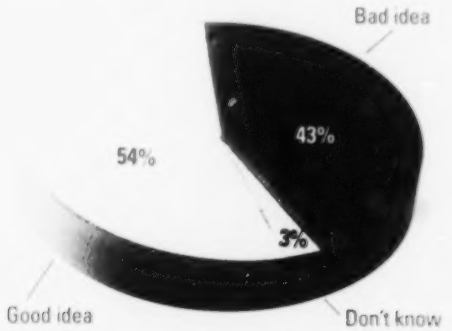
While few new teachers dismiss the importance of transmitting subject knowledge, it is for them only one of several important missions. For example, this survey touched on how teachers balance bolstering students' self-image with making sure kids master skills. Nearly half (45%) of new teachers think they are succeeding at their job when their own students have high self-esteem and feel good about their work—a percentage virtually equal to the proportion (46%) that believes mastering new skills and knowledge is the hallmark of student success.

Is Formal Teacher Training Necessary?

Do you think it is a good or bad idea to open up the teaching profession to qualified, motivated people who want to be teachers but who have not had formal teacher training?



NEW TEACHERS



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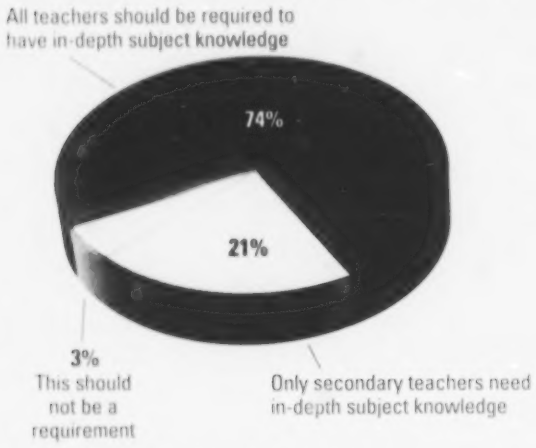
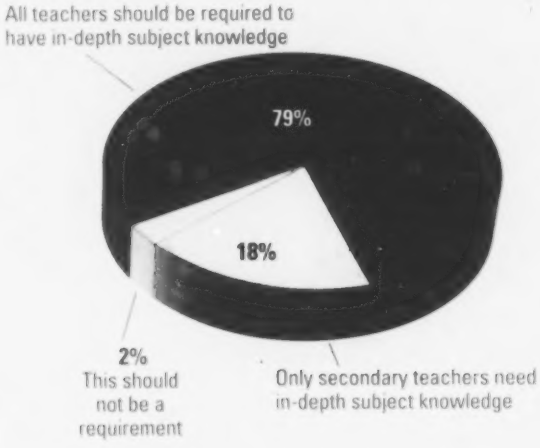
Teachers Should Know Their Subjects

Should all teachers be required to have in-depth understanding of the subjects they teach, only secondary school teachers, or should this generally not be a requirement?


All teachers should be required to have in-depth subject knowledge
74%
21%
3%
This should not be a requirement
Only secondary teachers need in-depth subject knowledge


All teachers should be required to have in-depth subject knowledge
79%
18%
2%
This should not be a requirement
Only secondary teachers need in-depth subject knowledge

Note: "Don't Know" responses ≤2%

NEW TEACHERS

Like others interviewed for this project, the teachers in a Maryland focus group were reluctant to say that kids knowing the right answers to questions should be a goal. "In our school the push is to show the kids how to get the answer—and who cares if it's right or wrong, as long as they know which way to go. If the kid tries a variety of ways, at least he was trying, at least he was on the right track."

"Do they make kids memorize all the presidents or all the 50 states anymore?" asked another teacher in Maryland. "Not in our school. It's ridiculous when they can get it off the computer in two seconds. We should teach them *how* to get that information." To many, certification requirements that focus on subject knowledge may not be the critical place for policy makers to focus their energies—they see competing priorities.

Opening Up the Profession

Most administrators and new teachers don't think that reducing the requirements for teacher certification would be very effective in improving quality. But the two groups differ in their reaction to the idea of

SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

"opening up the teaching profession to qualified, motivated people who want to be teachers but who have not had formal teacher training." At a time when many districts are picking up their recruitment efforts, more than a few administrators are questioning whether pre-service training is absolutely essential. More than half (54%) say that opening up the profession is a good idea, compared with 43% who say it's a bad one.

Recently licensed themselves, new teachers are more likely to resist the idea of dropping formal training requirements—57% think that this is a bad idea. Some may be concerned about appearances. In the focus groups, some worried that the prestige of their profession, already shaky, would be further downgraded if requirements were eased. As one teacher in Cleveland answered, "I think that person [a nonlicensed teaching candidate] should be allowed the opportunity—it should be based on an individual basis. But by the same token, we as teachers are trying to talk about how can we get more respect from society. They downplay us because we only teach nine months. With this, all of a sudden anybody can be a teacher."

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Going Back to School?

This chapter gives some sense of how those inside the system feel about teaching requirements, but what about those outside the field? Are well-educated young people put off by onerous certification requirements? Most don't believe that becoming a teacher is too difficult in the first place. Almost 1 in 5 (19%) college graduates say that their state calls for "a lot" of requirements to become a teacher. Even when it comes to the training and education the profession requires, half (49%) say that, as far as they know, these requirements are not difficult to meet.

But it seems that the notion of returning to school to become a teacher puts off some young people. More than half (55%) of the young professionals who are open to the idea of teaching—the "leaners"—say they would be a lot more likely to consider becoming a public school teacher if they were making a career change and didn't have to go back to school.

Several young professionals in the focus groups who were interested in teaching did not like the idea of going back to school at all—not so much because of the content as of the time and money required. After starting one career, a woman working in an insurance company considered the teaching route: "I kind of thought, 'Gee, I'd probably be pretty good in a classroom,' when I started getting burned out from my last job. I thought about it, but then, you have student loans and you have everything else, you know, car payments. Those are the things that you can't abandon to go back to school right away."

> ***"We as teachers are trying to talk about how can we get more respect from society... With [easing certification], all of a sudden anybody can be a teacher."***
>
> *— Cleveland teacher*

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CHAPTER FIVE: IS TEACHER PREPARATION THE PROBLEM?

The teachers and school administrators surveyed generally give education schools and teacher training programs good overall ratings. But new teachers believe they could have used far more preparation for the challenges of running real-world classrooms, such as maintaining discipline and helping students who are doing poorly. Large majorities of administrators and new teachers believe that mentoring programs for new teachers would be very effective in improving teacher quality.

Many of the findings reported in this study question the conventional wisdom about just what exactly is troubling the teaching profession—and what needs to be done about it. The attitudes and perceptions captured in the surveys strongly suggest that the "supply side" of the equation may be in better shape than many estimate: new teaching recruits are serious, highly motivated and committed professionals; young college graduates hardly view teaching as the profession of last resort; and money and certification requirements are probably not driving away overwhelming numbers of those who want to teach. Findings from this study do point to another problem area that has not received as much attention as may be warranted: New teachers say that their training could have done more to prepare them for the classroom.

Teacher Education: Initial Good Marks That Don't Hold Up

Initially, the new teachers surveyed give their education schools and teacher training programs good overall ratings. But survey questions that ask respondents to provide broad ratings often cloak specific areas of dissatisfaction, and teacher training programs are no exception. New teachers—and the administrators who supervise them—are palpably disappointed with the preparation they received in key areas.

At first, 7 in 10 new teachers (71%) say that the training programs they went through did a good or excellent job overall of preparing them for the classroom. Superintendents and principals are notably less positive: although about half (54%) give teacher training programs positive ratings, 45% give them only fair or poor ratings.

"They Don't Teach You How to Be a Classroom Teacher"

But new teachers believe they could have used far more preparation for the realities and challenges they inevitably had to confront when running real-world classrooms. What would seem to be simple issues of running the day-to-day mechanics of a classroom prove to be surprisingly distressing and stressful, especially during the early years of a teacher's career.

To many teachers, figuring out how to control students whose first instincts are anything but cooperative made just surviving a real accomplishment in the first year of teaching.

Six in 10 (60%) believe most new teachers take over classrooms without the requisite experience in how to actually run them. Just having a better handle on how to manage the classroom would have made a real difference to many of the teachers interviewed in the focus groups. In Cleveland, a new teacher told a story about a young colleague who left teaching because she was overwhelmed by all the juggling she had to do. "She was just a wonderful teacher, so creative. She just—I don't know if it was because everything was on her hands. Part of it was organization. You have to be very organized to be a teacher, there are so many things going on at one time. She couldn't handle it…scheduling things, calling parents, all those things

Administrators Less Upbeat on Quality of Teacher Training

How good a job do teacher training programs do when it comes to preparing teachers for the classroom?

NEW TEACHERS*

SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

* Base: New teachers who went through formal teacher training program or school of education (n=638)

take up all your extra time. My first year of teaching was a shock to me." Often, the more young teachers spoke about the gaps in their training, the more exasperated they became. "I don't think I've opened a book from a methods class since I've been teaching," said a Maryland teacher. "They don't teach you how to open your plan book and plan everything out. They don't teach you how to keep your paperwork in order. They don't teach you how to be a classroom teacher."

Although 41% of new teachers say their preparatory programs struck the right balance between theory and practice, more than half (56%) say there was too much education theory and not enough focus on practical classroom challenges. These perceptions sometimes created a dismissive backlash toward venerated education philosophers: "All these methods classes, Piaget, all that stuff—it's mostly useless," declared one teacher.

"He Won't Sit Down"

New teachers may enter the field energized and well-intentioned and committed to doing good work, yet they must often confront an inevitable, if rude, truth—some of their students will misbehave or be disruptive. And this is another area where new teachers wish they could have received better preparation in school: "They don't teach you how to deal with this student over here who won't sit down. They don't teach you the real aspects of teaching," said one teacher about his experience in an education school.

Most new teachers charge that their training programs did only a fair (36%) or even poor (21%) job of making sure they knew how to maintain student discipline. To many teachers, figuring out how to control students whose first instincts are anything but cooperative made just surviving a real accomplishment in the first year of teaching. "Every year I have been teaching, somebody's gotten run out of town. A couple of these teachers I knew personally. It was just a matter of discipline—they got walked on. You can only take so much of that," said a young teacher in Cleveland.

Nor has this perceived deficiency escaped the notice of school administrators. Two-thirds (68%) of superintendents and principals point to the very same shortfall in their new teachers and say they are unhappy with how well teacher preparation programs train teachers to deal with student discipline.

A Perfect Symmetry

If new teachers feel they have been inadequately prepared to handle student discipline and to manage classrooms, there should be little mystery about why

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this happens. Previous research suggests that professors of education place less priority on these topics. *Different Drummers*, a 1997 Public Agenda study of 900 education professors—the teachers of teachers—made clear that training teachers in techniques for maintaining classroom discipline or for managing classrooms ranks low on their list of teaching objectives. Only 37% believe it is absolutely essential for teacher education programs to focus on preparing teachers to "maintain discipline and order in the classroom"—this item came in eighth in a list of 10 attributes. Only 41% of education professors believe it is absolutely essential to train teachers in "pragmatic issues of running a classroom such as managing time and preparing lesson plans"—this item came in seventh in terms of importance. Coming in last, with only 12%, is teaching teachers to "expect students to be neat, on time and polite."

What's more, as far as most (61%) education professors are concerned, when a public school teacher faces a disruptive class, it probably means he or she has failed to make their lessons interesting enough. Education professors believe that maintaining classroom discipline becomes a non-issue if teachers focus on teaching kids to be active learners engaged in their own education. More than 8 in 10 (82%) want graduates of their programs to be committed to "teaching kids to be active learners who know how to learn."

"The Guide on the Side"

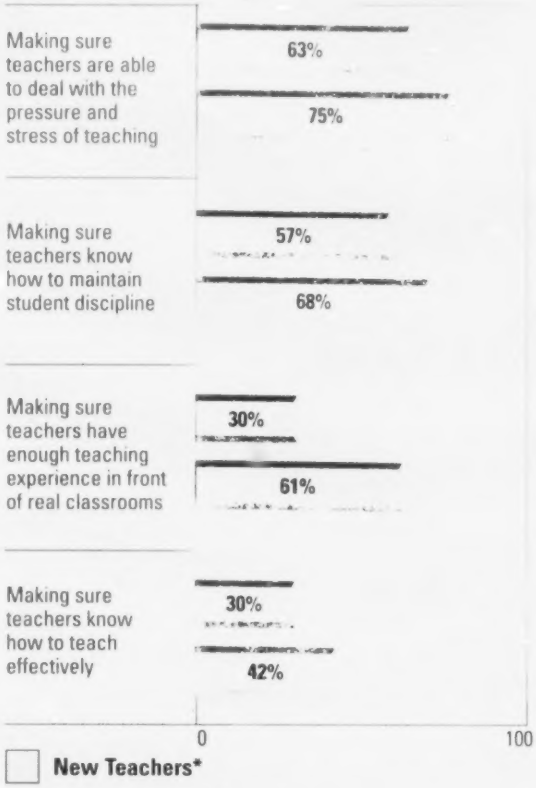
New teachers have clearly absorbed this part of the philosophy of teaching, believing that teaching kids to be active learners, to learn how to learn, should be their critical goal. The proper role of teachers is to "be the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage"—a phrase often heard in the focus groups with new teachers. About 3 in 4 (78%) new teachers say they see themselves as facilitators of learning who enable their students to learn on their own, and only 19% say their role is to be conveyors of knowledge who enlighten their students with what they know. This view is so well established that 87% of the school administrators surveyed also believe teachers should see themselves as facilitators of learning. Fully 92% of professors of education hold this view.

In general, this ideal may serve new teachers well: the vast majority (70%) say their teacher training program did a good or excellent job of making sure they knew how to teach effectively. But even as teacher education programs focus on teaching teachers to make lessons engaging and to tap and foster a love of learning, new teachers report they often find themselves unprepared for one reality they must face—what to do when they are unable to reach some kids who are low achieving. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) say that upon entering the profession, they were often at a loss when trying to help students who were doing poorly.

Where Teacher Training Falls Short

How good a job do teacher training programs do when it comes to each of the following?

% responding "fair" or "poor":



* Base: New teachers who went through formal teacher training program or school of education (n=638)

Teachers Should Facilitate Learning, Not Transmit Knowledge

Which is closer to your philosophy of the role of teachers?

	New Teachers	Superintendents/ Principals	Education Professors*
Teachers should see themselves as facilitators of learning who enable their students to learn on their own	78%	87%	92%
— OR —			
Teachers should see themselves as conveyors of knowledge who enlighten their students with what they know	19%	12%	7%

* *Different Drummers*, Public Agenda 1997

The frustration of simply not being able to get through to some kids, to help them make progress, takes a calculable—and debilitating—toll on teachers. They feel they are juggling a top-heavy agenda: Is their job to make sure kids feel good about themselves? To make sure they know how to learn? Or simply to make sure they learn?

Trial by Fire

The new teachers we interviewed had many positive things to say about the education schools they attended, and indeed most probably view it as something indispensable. What's more, some teachers in the focus groups acknowledged that there was only so much any professional training program could do to prepare students to deal with the real world, that experience would have to do the rest.

Yet the shortfalls in their training take on jarring significance, especially when they are experienced in combination and especially during their first few years in the field. For many, there was real frustration that the agenda of the teacher education programs, while well-intentioned, sent them off quite vulnerable and at risk for trial by fire. Ultimately, most (63%) come to the conclusion that their programs did only a fair or poor job of preparing them for the pressure and stress of teaching. Three in 4 (75%) administrators agree, giving teacher training programs negative marks on this item.

A Real-World Antidote

It is such visions that probably prompt 60% of new teachers to say that in their experience most people do not go into the field "with enough experience in running a classroom." Nor has this feeling escaped the notice of education professors, many of whom also suspect the very same problem. More than 6 in 10 (63%) worry that education programs often fail to prepare teachers for the challenges of teaching in the real world.

Perhaps this is what drives 51% of new teachers to believe "requiring new teachers to spend much more time in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers" would prove to be very effective in improving teacher quality— and an even greater percentage (72%) of school administrators to agree. In sharp contrast, only 20% of new teachers and 19% of school administrators think "requiring teachers to earn *graduate* degrees in education" would be a very effective way to improve teacher quality.

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CHAPTER SIX: DO WORKING CONDITIONS UNDERMINE TEACHER PERFORMANCE?

New teachers are divided on which has more of an effect on student achievement—teacher quality or other factors such as parental involvement and socioeconomic circumstances. Large numbers even doubt whether a team of exceptionally talented teachers can turn around a school that is struggling. They want to work in schools with involved parents, well-behaved students, smaller classes and supportive administrators, and most would even pass up significantly higher salaries in favor of working conditions that offer these. New teachers in public schools are less likely than teachers in private schools to feel appreciated and more likely to say their jobs are frustrating.

The opportunity to be effective is controlled not only by the talents, instincts and techniques new teachers bring—or fail to bring—into the classroom. It is also affected by a host of environmental factors. Some of the most important relate to the backgrounds and circumstances of students, and others relate to the conditions of the workplace—the school, classroom and hallways teachers work in. This study, as well as previous Public Agenda studies, show that teachers are looking for parental involvement, support from administrators and a mission-oriented atmosphere where enough resources are in place.

Parents Matter

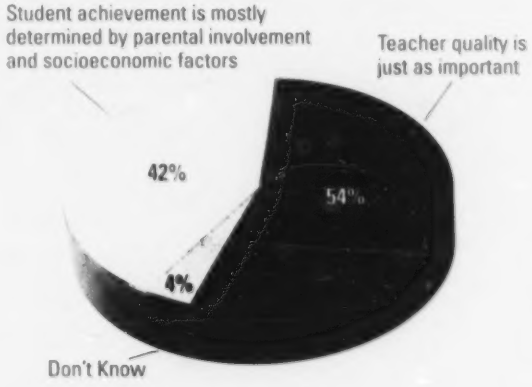
An earlier Public Agenda study, *Playing Their Parts*, provided an extended glimpse of the kind of support teachers feel they need so they can do their job. The research extensively examined the issue of parental involvement from the perspective of both parents and teachers. By large majorities, teachers felt that parents too often fail to hold up their end of the bargain. They complained that parents fail to provide children with structure at home and neglect to teach discipline, perseverance and good manners—and without this, teachers said, they cannot do their job effectively.

New teachers are so convinced that parents are key that, in this survey, when asked if student achievement is mostly determined by such things as parental involvement and socioeconomic factors or whether teacher quality is just as important, teachers believe they are just as important by only a tentative 54% to 42% margin. "I can't control what happens at home," said a Maryland teacher. "I can't make them do their homework. I can call their parents, but if their parents don't care about them or their parents aren't there, they're not going to do it. I can't control every aspect of their lives." Asked if bringing in a team of exceptionally talented teachers can turn around a school with low achievement and uninvolved parents, the answer is far more resounding—73% of teachers say it wouldn't be enough.

The opportunity to be effective would seem to be critical for professionals like teachers because it is one of the principal reasons they are there to begin with—to

How Much Can Teachers Really Do?

Is student achievement mostly determined by such things as parental involvement and socioeconomic factors, or is teacher quality just as important?



NEW TEACHERS

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make a difference. As reported earlier, we asked teachers to make a bottom-line choice: What would they prefer, a salary hike or more supportive parents and students? Fully 86% of new teachers would opt to work in a school where student behavior and parental support were significantly better over a school that paid a significantly higher salary.

These findings—that circumstances stemming from outside the classroom often hinder their effectiveness—echo previous Public Agenda research. In *Playing Their Parts*, for example, a large majority (81%) of teachers complained that parents who refuse to hold their kids accountable for their behavior or academic performance are a serious problem in their schools.[9] The 1996 study *Given the Circumstances*, cites another common complaint: almost half (47%) of the 1,164 teachers interviewed said that there is "too much drugs and violence" in the schools. In the same study, almost 9 in 10 (88%) teachers favored taking persistent troublemakers out of class so they could concentrate on the students who want to learn.[10]

This may also be part of the reason reducing class size has been so important for so long to teachers—if kids are having trouble learning or are simply more difficult to handle, if they are getting less support and preparation at home, simply reducing their number would make the problem more manageable. In this study, the proposal attracting far and away the greatest support as a means to improve teacher quality is reducing class size, something 86% point to as a "very effective" measure. In the minds of teachers, quality will go up when the head count goes down.

"Stand Behind Me"

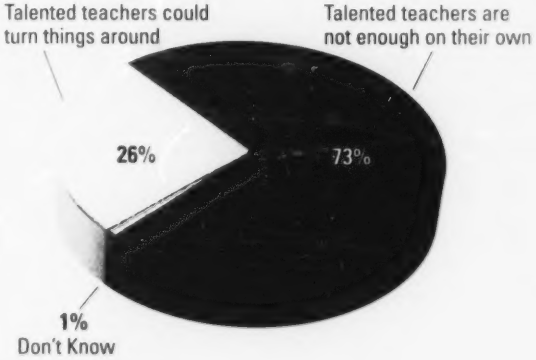
New teachers are also focused on school leadership. In focus groups, most voiced admiration for selective administrators who exercise quality control, carefully choosing personnel and resisting compromises, even if these are driven by exigencies of the school calendar. The theme, once again, is a workplace where staff can focus on being effective and getting results instead of dealing with distractions.

The new teachers we interviewed often returned to the issue of leadership: when their principals were strong and fair leaders, the school environment flourished; when they fell short, everyone felt it. As we have seen in Chapter Three, ask teachers to choose, and schools with higher salaries lose out to schools where administrators give them strong backing and support (82%). A New Jersey teacher knew exactly what she meant by administrative support: "For example, when you come head-to-head with a parent, and you gave a grade to a student they feel they didn't deserve and the parent comes to you and wants that grade changed. I want the administration to stand behind me and say, 'This is my classroom policy, this is my grading policy, the criteria were not met, and that's why this grade was given.' Stand behind me."

Schools with higher salaries would also lose the new teachers in our survey to schools that have highly motivated and effective teachers on staff (77%). A Cleveland teacher compared her experience in two schools: "My former administrator hired a lot of bad apples. She wasn't tough enough, she just wanted to fill positions. At my present school, when they hired four new people they were constantly interviewing. I met tons of people interviewing for this position, and the day before school started they still did not have a

Can Teachers Turn Things Around in Adverse Circumstances?

In a school with low student achievement and uninvolved parents, could bringing in exceptionally talented teachers turn things around, or would this not be enough on its own?



NEW TEACHERS

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person. If they wanted to just fill the position, they could have taken just any one of those people. But that's not what he wanted to do."

The Instructive Case of Private School Teachers

The situation of private school teachers is instructive because it shows, from a different angle, how important a supportive environment can be to the essential mission of the professional educator.

For this study, interviews were conducted with 250 teachers working in private and parochial schools for five years or less, and they responded to a virtually identical questionnaire as did the public school teachers. Private school teachers are usually paid less than their public school counterparts—84% of private school teachers responding to this survey, for example, report their salary is $25,000 or less, while 75% of public school respondents report it is more than that. Yet private school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to report that morale in their schools is high (a 49% to 28% difference).

Why is the workplace atmosphere more positive in private schools? Fully 86% of new private school teachers say they feel "respected and appreciated"—among public school teachers the percentage drops to 66%. More than half (54%) strongly agree with the statement "At my school teachers can count on the support of the parents"—among public school teachers, the percentage drops to only 20%. Private school teachers are also less likely to say they face a lot of frustration in their work (23% private, compared with 39% public). Beginning with Chapter One, this study has portrayed public school teachers as dedicated, motivated and idealistic—yet it is clear they find themselves working under conditions that provide less support than their private school counterparts. What's more, the difference in support is not so much in material conditions as in the positive reinforcement and backing by parents and administrators.

A focus group of private—mostly parochial—school teachers in Westchester, New York offered a counter-intuitive twist on the notion of the parent as a consumer. Because the parents were choosing to send their children to private school and paying for it out of their pocket, their expectations of *their children* became tougher and their support of their teachers became stronger. Among public school teachers we often heard a very different dynamic. "There are two kinds of parents," said a New York City teacher. "One you never see, they are invisible. The other will bite your head off because you gave Johnny the C he deserved, not the A they were expecting."

What's Wrong

Scientists fighting new disease place extravagant urgency and importance upon isolating and properly identifying the virus—no cure can be found without a good diagnosis of the problem. Educators may look at this with understandable jealousy—in their world, there is little agreement on what is wrong yet many proposals about how to make things right.

In this study we have offered some clues worth investigating. From a variety of perspectives, majorities of our respondents have identified the problems similarly and provided some answers about how to make things better. The raw ingredients seem fine, they say, but at critical moments the training process falls short and needs more than fine-tuning. Who becomes a teacher seems less of a problem than what happens to them once they enter a classroom. In the rush to improve education for the nation's youngsters, policy makers may do well to revisit their assumptions of what is wrong.

Morale Higher Among Private School Teachers

% responding:	Private School Teachers	Public School Teachers
Their job gives them a sense that they are respected and appreciated	86%	66%
They can count on parental support	54%	20%
Teachers' morale is high at their school	49%	28%

NEW TEACHERS

AFTERWORD

Three Unwarranted Assumptions

An Afterword by Deborah Wadsworth

As we reflected on the views expressed by the young college graduates interviewed for *A Sense of Calling*, we were struck by how often their responses challenge widely held assumptions about teachers and teaching. While their perspective is just one of many factors to be weighed in considering how to strengthen the profession, those who care about the future of public education might be well-advised not to dismiss their views out of hand. Three assumptions about teaching today warrant particular scrutiny in light of the findings from *A Sense of Calling*.

Teachers on the Verge

Almost every day, news reports suggest there are teachers somewhere in the nation's public school systems who are disgruntled and disheartened and who undoubtedly present serious problems for their districts, colleagues and students. To be sure, there are teachers who are unhappy and ineffective, just as there are problematic individuals in any profession.

But this study offers an alternative portrait of the people now coming into the profession. It shows that the majority of new teachers possess at least one extraordinarily appealing quality: They are doing something that they want to do. By their own account, the beginning teachers we interviewed stated loudly and clearly that they want to teach. They are motivated and committed—energized by a sense of purpose. Beginning teachers, these data suggest, are far more committed to their jobs than their nonteaching classmates who have wandered willy-nilly into other lines of work fresh out of college. Setting aside for a moment debates over the adequacy of their preparation, their passion for teaching is striking. It is palpable, vastly underappreciated and a valuable asset that money can't buy.

Setting aside for a moment debates over the adequacy of their preparation, their passion for teaching is striking. It is palpable, vastly underappreciated and a valuable asset that money can't buy.

The Simple Economic Approach

The subject of money lies at the heart of another prevailing assumption about teachers and teaching—low salaries keep good people away. Surely the money issue cannot be dismissed lightly. Teachers do believe that they are underpaid. They believe that many of those in jobs that are far less challenging are routinely paid significantly higher salaries—something teachers find especially discouraging.

But it also seems incontrovertible, based on this study, that raising teacher salaries by itself won't (and probably shouldn't) radically change who enters the field or who decides to stay once there. The simple economic approach—pay higher salaries, attract people now going into higher-paying professions—overlooks incentives that are significantly more important to most teachers and would-be teachers. What appeals to them is the idea of teaching. What they most want is what they believe will make them more effective in their work—smaller classes and much stronger support from administration and parents.

The assumption that there are large numbers of highly qualified young people sneering at teaching jobs and turning their backs on the profession to pursue other, more lucrative careers doesn't seem to hold water. Almost 1 in 5 young graduates now in other fields express a real interest in teaching, but it's not primarily low salaries that keep them away. What these young people want are jobs where they can truly make a difference. And what would bring

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them into the fold? Being able to teach in an environment where they reach out to kids and help them learn. Like those already on the job, these young people want schools with manageable classes, supportive administrations and youngsters who are eager to learn.

Not from the Pages of a Book

A third assumption stems from a regular flow of data about the adequacy of the profession, especially teachers' lack of preparation in the subjects they teach. Reacting to these reports, policy makers have put special emphasis on measures to insure that teachers have a better command of their subject specialties. These proposals may be needed and may be productive, but, once again, it may be important to listen carefully to what those in the trenches say.

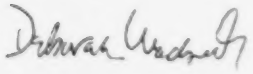
They speak powerfully about the shock of going from the theory of teacher education into the reality of the classroom. To leave them there—eager to help, but lacking the skills to intercede—seems almost cruel.

What is clear from *A Sense of Calling* is teachers' fundamental belief that the heart of good teaching comes not from the pages of a book, but from what happens daily in the classroom. How teachers engage children's interest, how they get kids to persevere, how they explain difficult material, how they communicate its importance, how they inspire effort, how they manage a respectful and productive classroom—all of these, teachers tell us, are as important as "knowing your stuff." What their preparation lacks most, they say, is not content, but the training needed to manage a classroom, bring classes alive and make sure their students actually learn. Most beginning teachers tell us that when they first entered the classroom, they were often at a loss when they tried to help struggling students. Yet they had every desire to do so.

We have all stumbled into situations where it's clear that experience is something you don't get until just *after* you need it. Our beginning teachers understand this all too well. They speak powerfully about the shock of going from the theory of teacher education into the reality of the classroom. To leave them there—eager to help, but lacking the skills to intercede—seems almost cruel.

Will Leadership Turn a Deaf Ear?

As we say in the introduction to *A Sense of Calling*, understanding what matters to people, what motivates them and why, can be of inestimable value in crafting policies and reforms that might actually make a difference. This study reveals an altruistic, passionate group of young adults who believe teaching is a calling. The strength and vibrancy of their morale and motivation are striking. It seems almost criminal to ignore what they have to offer by turning a deaf ear to what they have to say.



Deborah Wadsworth, President, Public Agenda

TABLE ONE: Absolutely Essential Job Characteristics

Here's a list of various aspects of jobs. Please tell me how important it is to you personally that a job has each characteristic. [INSERT RANDOMLY] — Is that absolutely essential, important but not essential or not too important for a job to have? Do you feel your job has this, or not?

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS	PRIVATE/PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS	YOUNG GRADUATES
That a job involves work you love to do			
Absolutely essential	83	82	60
Important but not essential	17	18	37
Not too important	*	*	2
Yes, job has this	**96**	**96**	**80**
That a job allows enough time to be with family			
Absolutely essential	81	82	73
Important but not essential	18	18	24
Not too important	*	1	3
Yes, job has this	**79**	**80**	**79**
That a job contributes to society and helps others			
Absolutely essential	72	70	39
Important but not essential	28	29	53
Not too important	1	1	8
Yes, job has this	**97**	**98**	**83**
That a job provides the kind of supervision and support you need			
Absolutely essential	64	57	41
Important but not essential	34	38	48
Not too important	2	4	11
Yes, job has this	**78**	**80**	**77**
That a job has job security			
Absolutely essential	60	45	54
Important but not essential	38	49	40
Not too important	3	6	6
Yes, job has this	**84**	**82**	**83**
That a job gives you the sense that you are respected and appreciated			
Absolutely essential	59	60	61
Important but not essential	40	40	36
Not too important	1	1	3
Yes, job has this	**66**	**86**	**79**
That a job has good opportunities for advancement			
Absolutely essential	33	26	55
Important but not essential	57	55	41
Not too important	9	20	4
Yes, job has this	**59**	**45**	**68**
That a job pays well			
Absolutely essential	30	17	38
Important but not essential	66	66	60
Not too important	5	16	3
Yes, job has this	**31**	**24**	**72**

Public School Teachers: n=664 Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250 Young Graduates: n=802

Note: Percentages in tables may not equal 100% due to rounding or missing answer categories. Rounding may also cause slight discrepancies between numbers in the text and numbers in the tables. An asterisk indicates a finding of zero or less than one half percent.

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TABLE TWO: Absolutely Essential Characteristics of Effective Teachers

Now I want to ask you which qualities are absolutely essential to being a really effective teacher, and which are less important. [INSERT RANDOMLY]. Is that absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important to being a really effective teacher?

[Ask teachers] And thinking about yourself right now, do you feel you have this well in hand or do you need to do better?

[Ask superintendents/principals] Thinking about the new teachers coming into the profession, do most have this well in hand or do too many fall short?

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS	PRIVATE/PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS	SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS
An ability to maintain discipline and order in the classroom			
Absolutely essential	91	87	88
Important but not essential	9	13	12
Not too important	*	*	*
Have this well in hand	70	67	44
A love of kids			
Absolutely essential	91	90	86
Important but not essential	9	10	14
Not too important	1	*	*
Have this well in hand	95	93	86
Effective teaching techniques			
Absolutely essential	83	71	84
Important but not essential	17	28	16
Not too important	*	*	*
Have this well in hand	58	58	52
High standards and expectations for all students			
Absolutely essential	82	73	87
Important but not essential	18	26	13
Not too important	1	1	*
Have this well in hand	77	79	56
A talent for really motivating kids to do their best			
Absolutely essential	81	78	81
Important but not essential	19	21	18
Not too important	*	1	*
Have this well in hand	58	58	47
An ability to work well with students whose backgrounds are very different from your own			
Absolutely essential	79	69	75
Important but not essential	21	29	24
Not too important	1	1	1
Have this well in hand	73	75	45
An ability to establish strong working relationships with parents			
Absolutely essential	67	68	71
Important but not essential	32	31	29
Not too important	1	2	*
Have this well in hand	60	70	43
In-depth knowledge of their subjects			
Absolutely essential	67	62	60
Important but not essential	33	37	38
Not too important	1	1	1
Have this well in hand	75	71	74
Being well-versed in theories of child development and learning			
Absolutely essential	38	33	45
Important but not essential	55	58	51
Not too important	7	8	4
Have this well in hand	59	64	55
Knowledge of the history and philosophy of education			
Absolutely essential	15	14	10
Important but not essential	58	58	57
Not too important	28	29	34
Have this well in hand	62	65	59

Public School Teachers: n=664 Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250 Superintendents/Principals: n=511

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TABLE THREE: Attitudes About Teachers and Teaching

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [INSERT RANDOMLY]

	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS		PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS		SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS		YOUNG GRADUATES	
% RESPONDING	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat/ Strongly	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat/ Strongly	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat/ Strongly	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat/ Strongly
Teaching requires more talent and hard work than a lot of other professions*	65 25	7 3	58 30	9 2	N/A	N/A	43 36	16 4
Teaching is a profession people should pursue only if they have a true sense of calling^	55 31	11 3	62 26	10 2	53 31	12 3	51 30	15 3
Teachers today are often made the scapegoats for all the problems facing education*	52 40	6 1	36 44	14 5	56 34	7 2	39 37	17 6
I am (Teachers are) seriously underpaid*	40 35	20 5	53 30	10 6	N/A	N/A	49 29	14 4
I resent the fact that people who have easier and less important jobs get paid far more than I do^	40 29	16 14	28 30	20 22	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Teachers at my school/in my community can count on the support of the parents*	20 42	23 14	54 32	10 4	N/A	N/A	22 41	19 9
Teaching is an isolating profession that offers little opportunity to interact with colleagues^	7 18	30 45	4 21	38 36	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Given the right opportunity, I would seriously consider a switch to the [private or parochial schools]/ [public schools]^	7 16	22 54	20 22	15 42	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
You have to be really smart to be a teacher	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	18 41	32 8
You have to really love kids to be a teacher	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	63 24	11 3

*Public School Teachers (split sample): n=354
Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250
^Public School Teachers (split sample): n=343
Superintendents/Principals: n=511
Young Graduates: n=802

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TABLE FOUR: Characteristics of New Teachers

Speaking from your own experience, how close does each of the following come to describing new teachers who have come into the field over the past several years? [INSERT RANDOMLY]

	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS		PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS		SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS	
% RESPONDING	Very close/ Somewhat close	Not too close/ Not close at all	Very close/ Somewhat close	Not too close/ Not close at all	Very close/ Somewhat close	Not too close/ Not close at all
Most are highly motivated and energetic*	69	3	63	2	68	2
	29	*	33	1	29	*
Most handle parents and students with maturity and professionalism*	44	8	33	10	36	8
	45	2	52	2	53	2
Most are willing to be held accountable for their students' success and their own effectiveness*	35	9	38	12	40	10
	52	3	47	2	45	4
Most hold kids to high academic standards and grade accordingly*	34	10	29	13	34	9
	52	2	50	5	53	4
Most are realistic about how challenging and stressful teaching can be*	17	28	22	22	21	24
	35	19	37	18	38	16
Too many become teachers for the wrong reasons*	16	33	12	35	7	30
	29	20	32	18	24	37
Too many have trouble writing essays free of mistakes in grammar and spelling*	11	27	13	26	10	29
	29	22	32	19	34	23
Most come in with enough experience in running a classroom*	11	37	10	38	13	29
	27	24	32	17	40	18

*Public School Teachers (split sample): n=354 Public School Teachers (split sample): n=343
Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250 Superintendents/Principals: n=511

TABLE FIVE: Attitudes About The Teaching Profession

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [INSERT RANDOMLY]

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS		PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS		SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS	
	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	**Disagree** Somewhat/ Strongly	**Agree** Strongly/ Somewhat	**Disagree** Somewhat/ Strongly	**Agree** Strongly/ Somewhat	**Disagree** Somewhat/ Strongly
The only way to really find out if a teacher can teach well is to give them a classroom and watch them work*	59	10	63	9	57	11
	26	5	26	2	28	4
Teacher preparation programs need to do a better job of weeding out students who are unsuitable for the profession'	42	16	32	19	55	9
	34	7	42	5	33	3
Negative media coverage discourages talented, well-educated people from pursuing teaching as a career*	35	20	18	29	55	10
	36	9	40	12	29	5
The lack of upward mobility for teachers is a key obstacle to making the profession attractive*	27	22	18	25	32	23
	41	9	42	13	33	11
Teachers would have more prestige if collective bargaining and lifetime tenure were eliminated'	9	37	13	28	32	24
	27	22	37	9	30	11
Too many regulations and certification rules discourage talented, well-educated people from pursuing teaching as a career*	20	23	21	25	30	25
	31	24	33	19	28	16
Higher salaries would be the most effective way to improve teacher quality'	24	27	17	30	25	22
	36	13	31	22	44	9

*Public School Teachers (split sample): n=354
Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250

'Public School Teachers (split sample): n=343
Superintendents/Principals: n=511

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TABLE SIX: Rating Teacher Training

[Ask teachers] How good a job did your teacher training do when it came to each of the following? [INSERT RANDOMLY]

[Ask superintendents/principals] How good a job do you feel education schools and teacher training programs do when it comes to each of the following?

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS		PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS		SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS	
	Excellent/ good	Fair/ poor	Excellent/ good	Fair/ poor	Excellent/ good	Fair/ poor
Making sure teachers have enough teaching experience in front of real classrooms	32	22	35	22	6	46
	38	7	33	10	33	15
Preparing teachers for the classroom	28	25	34	21	6	38
	43	5	41	4	49	7
Making sure teachers know how to teach effectively	23	24	26	19	6	36
	47	6	51	4	52	6
Making sure teachers know how to maintain student discipline	14	36	14	36	3	52
	29	21	35	16	30	16
Making sure teachers are able to deal with the pressure and stress of teaching	11	38	10	40	2	53
	26	24	34	16	23	22

Public School Teachers: n=638 Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=213 Superintendents/Principals: n=511
Base: New teachers who went through formal teacher training program or school of education

TABLE SEVEN: Measures For Improving Teacher Quality

Now I'm going to ask you how effective you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality. [INSERT RANDOMLY]

	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS		PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS		SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS	
% RESPONDING	Very effective/ Somewhat effective	Not too effective/ Not effective at all	Very effective/ Somewhat effective	Not too effective/ Not effective at all	Very effective/ Somewhat effective	Not too effective/ Not effective at all
Reducing class size	86	1	78	1	56	6
	13	*	20	1	38	1
Requiring teachers at the secondary school level to major in the subjects they are teaching	59	6	59	6	63	3
	34	2	31	3	31	1
Increasing professional development opportunities for teachers	57	4	52	4	68	1
	38	1	41	2	29	1
Increasing teacher salaries	52	4	41	12	41	5
	42	1	44	2	53	1
Requiring new teachers to spend much more time teaching in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers	51	8	52	10	72	2
	37	3	33	4	25	1
Requiring teachers to earn graduate degrees in education	20	25	15	32	19	20
	44	10	38	15	54	6
Requiring teachers to pass tough tests of their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching	16	26	16	25	16	22
	46	10	47	11	53	8
Eliminating teacher tenure	12	33	20	19	36	12
	35	18	42	9	42	8
Tying teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance	12	29	9	31	17	23
	33	25	33	25	46	12
Relying more heavily on alternative certification programs	8	26	13	27	7	31
	45	14	43	9	40	19
Reducing the regulations and requirements for teacher certification	7	34	10	37	11	31
	18	40	24	25	35	22

Public School Teachers: n=664 Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250 Superintendents/Principals: n=511

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TABLE EIGHT: Suggestions for Addressing Teacher Shortage

Generally speaking, do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to do each of the following?

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS	PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS	SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS
Pay higher salaries to teachers who agree to work in difficult schools with hard-to-educate children			
Good idea	84	80	82
Bad idea	15	19	16
Pay higher salaries to teachers who prove to be highly effective in improving student academic performance			
Good idea	69	74	80
Bad idea	28	26	18
Pay more money to teachers in subjects like math and science, where there are severe shortages			
Good idea	44	44	55
Bad idea	54	55	43
Open up the teaching profession to qualified, motivated people who want to be teachers but who have not had formal teacher training			
Good idea	39	45	54
Bad idea	57	52	43

Public School Teachers: n=664 Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250 Superintendents/Principals: n=511

TABLE NINE: Working Conditions Vs. Higher Salary

[Ask teachers] Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer to work in?

[Ask superintendents/principals] Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which do you think a typical teacher would prefer to work in?

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS	PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS	SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS
The school with a significantly higher salary	12	9	24
— OR —			
The school where student behavior and parental support were significantly better	86	91	73
The school with a significantly higher salary	17	13	25
— OR —			
The school where administrators gave strong backing and support to teachers	82	86	73
The school with a significantly higher salary	23	15	31
— OR —			
The school with teachers who were highly motivated and effective	77	84	67
The school with a significantly higher salary	25	15	36
— OR —			
The school whose academic mission and teaching philosophy you share	74	85	62

Public School Teachers: n=664 Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250 Superintendents/Principals: n=511

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TABLE TEN: Potential Sources of New Teachers

Please rate the following in terms of how good you think they are as a source for new teachers for the public schools. [INSERT RANDOMLY]

% RESPONDING	PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS		PRIVATE/ PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS		SUPERINTENDENTS/ PRINCIPALS	
	Excellent/ good	Fair/ poor	Excellent/ good	Fair/ poor	Excellent/ good	Fair/ poor
Educated professionals interested in switching careers to teaching*	20	16	22	23	17	23
	56	4	45	7	56	3
Young college graduates from such programs as Teach for America†	13	17	17	13	15	13
	38	2	39	3	48	3
Retired military personnel from such programs as Troops to Teachers*	10	25	11	27	9	32
	36	9	34	9	34	13
Teachers from private and parochial schools†	9	29	44	9	10	31
	50	5	43	2	51	6

*Public School Teachers (split sample): n=354
Private/Parochial School Teachers: n=250

†Public School Teachers (split sample): n=343
Superintendents/Principals: n=511

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METHODOLOGY

A Sense of Calling is based on three telephone surveys: one of 664 public school and 250 private school K-12 teachers who have taught for five years or less; one of 511 public school superintendents and principals; and one of 802 college graduates under the age of 30. The surveys were preceded by six focus groups conducted in sites across the country, as well as by 25 interviews with experts and practitioners in the education field.

The Survey of New Teachers

The interviews with new teachers were conducted between February 8 and March 31, 2000, and averaged 33 minutes in length.

Telephone interviews were conducted with 664 K-12 public school teachers across the country who have been in the profession for five years or less. The sample was generated in this way: A random sample of public school teachers identified as having taught at their current school for five years or less was drawn from a comprehensive list of U.S. public school teachers. Screening questions excluded those who had been teaching for more than five years. The sample was drawn proportionate to the universe of all teachers by urbanicity (urban/suburban/rural school districts) and grade level taught (elementary/middle/high school). The margin of error for the 664 public school teachers is plus or minus four percentage points; it is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

Additional telephone interviews were conducted with 250 K-12 private school teachers who have been in the profession for five years or less: 125 with independent private school teachers and 125 with Catholic parochial school teachers. The same sampling and screening procedures used for public school teachers were used for this sample. The margin of error for the 250 private school teachers is plus or minus six percentage points.

The Survey of Superintendents and Principals

Telephone interviews were conducted with 511 superintendents and principals across the country who work in K-12 public school districts: 253 with superintendents and 258 with principals. The interviews were conducted between February 3 and March 2, 2000, and averaged 30 minutes in length.

The random sample of superintendents was drawn from a comprehensive list of U.S. public school superintendents. Superintendents in school districts with 2,500 or more students were oversampled to ensure that they would be sufficiently represented in the sample; eighty percent of the students in the country attend schools in districts of this size, and 72% of the superintendents in the sample are from these districts. The random sample of principals was drawn from a comprehensive list of U.S. public school principals, proportionate to the universe of principals by urbanicity and type of school. The margin of error for the 511 superintendents and principals is plus or minus four percentage points.

The Survey of College Graduates Under 30

Telephone interviews were conducted with 802 adults under the age of 30 who had at least a four-year college degree and who were not teachers. The interviews were conducted between February 21 and March 13, 2000, and averaged 20 minutes in length.

The sample of college graduates was generated in this way: First, 312 college graduates under 30 were gathered through a standard, random-digit-dialing technique, whereby every household in the continental United States, including those with unlisted numbers, had an equal chance of being contacted. Screening questions ensured that only those who met the requisite age and education requirements were included in the final sample. The margin of error for the random sample of 312 college graduates is plus or minus six percentage points. An additional 490 respondents, culled from a targeted list of adults under 30 compiled and maintained by Survey Sampling, Inc., were screened and then interviewed. This is a self-selected, non-random sample and no margin of error is reported. A comparison of the results of the random sample (n=312) and the targeted sample (n=490) revealed no substantive differences in responses between the two groups.

As in all surveys, question-order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes influence results. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensive pre-testing of the three questionnaires through in-person and telephone interviews.

The survey instruments were designed by Public Agenda, which is solely responsible for all analysis and interpretation of the results. The samples of teachers, superintendents and principals were provided by Market Data Retrieval, Inc.; the random and targeted samples of college graduates were provided by Survey Sampling, Inc. The three surveys were fielded by Robinson and Muenster Associates, Inc. of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The Qualitative Research

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from these groups were crucial to the design of the surveys. To give voice to the attitudes captured in the survey, quotes were drawn from the focus groups and from follow-up interviews with survey respondents.

Six focus groups were conducted: three with public school teachers under the age of 30; one with private and parochial school teachers under 30; and two with young professionals under 30. The focus groups took place in Old Bridge, NJ; Cleveland, OH; Potomac, MD; and Westchester, NY. All focus groups were moderated by Public Agenda senior staff.

Public Agenda also interviewed 25 education experts and practitioners to obtain grounding in the current substantive issues surrounding the training, recruiting, retention, quality and working conditions of new teachers. Interviews were conducted with public, private and parochial school teachers, superintendents and principals; academic researchers; and public officials and policy makers, among others. Background research for this study also included a review of the current literature and previous surveys.

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Research

On Thin Ice: How Advocates and Opponents Could Misread the Public's Views on Vouchers and Charter Schools Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson and Tony Foleno with Ann Duffett and Patrick Foley. Charter schools have taken root in more than half of the states in the country, and school vouchers in three sites. Yet most Americans, who say in this report that they do not understand these concepts, have been left behind. Includes a focus on parents in voucher and charter communities. 1999. 62 pp. Price: $10.00 ISBN #1-889483-62-1

Reality Check 2000 Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffett. The third edition of "Reality Check" on the status of school reform. Printed in the February 16, 2000, issue of Education Week. Available online at www.edweek.org.

Standards and Accountability: Where the Public Stands Jean Johnson with Ann Duffett. Prepared for the 1999 National Education Summit, a gathering of state governors, CEOs and education leaders, this paper reviews recent opinion research from Public Agenda and other organizations. 6 pp. Free PDF at www.publicagenda.org. 1999.

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